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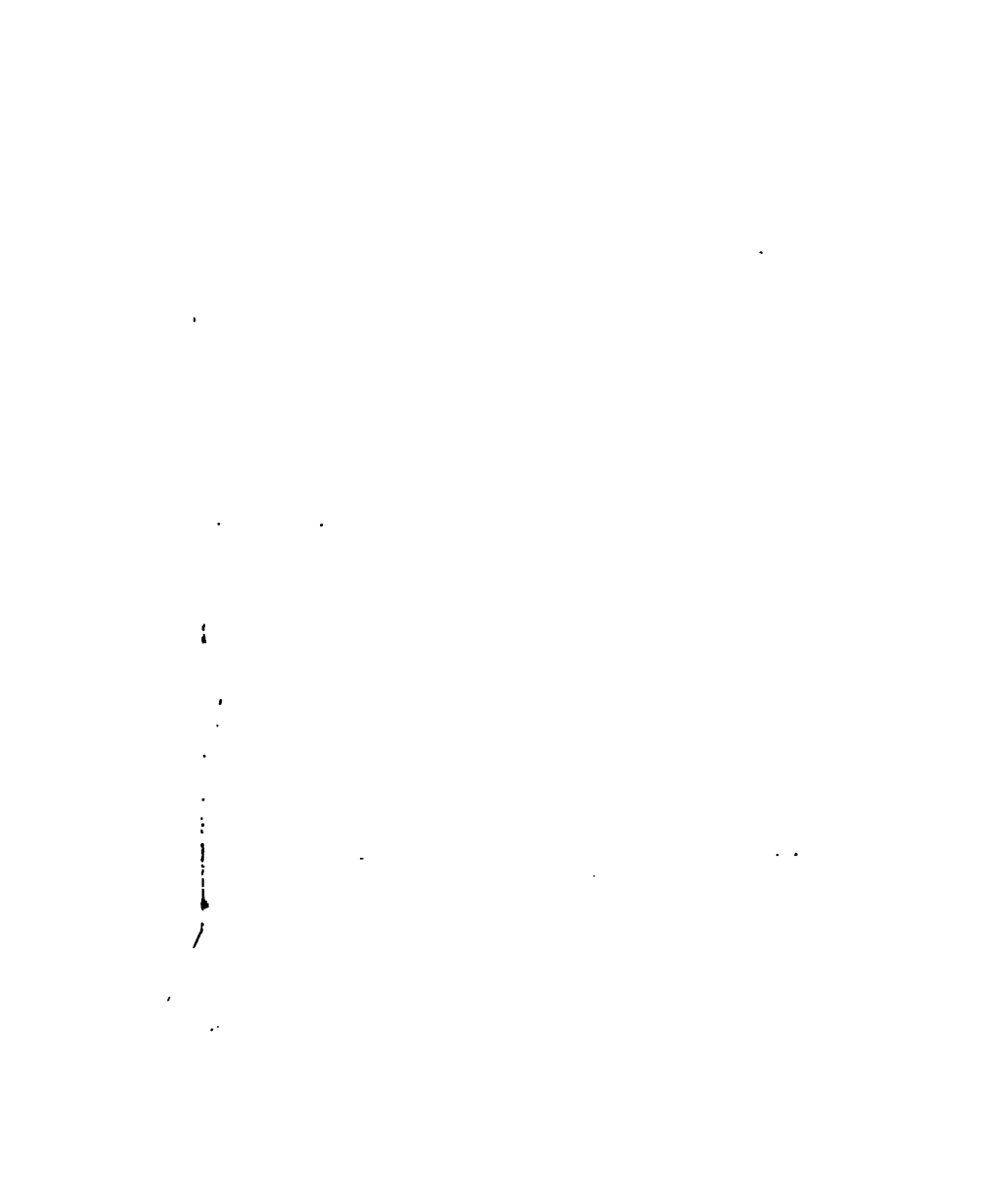


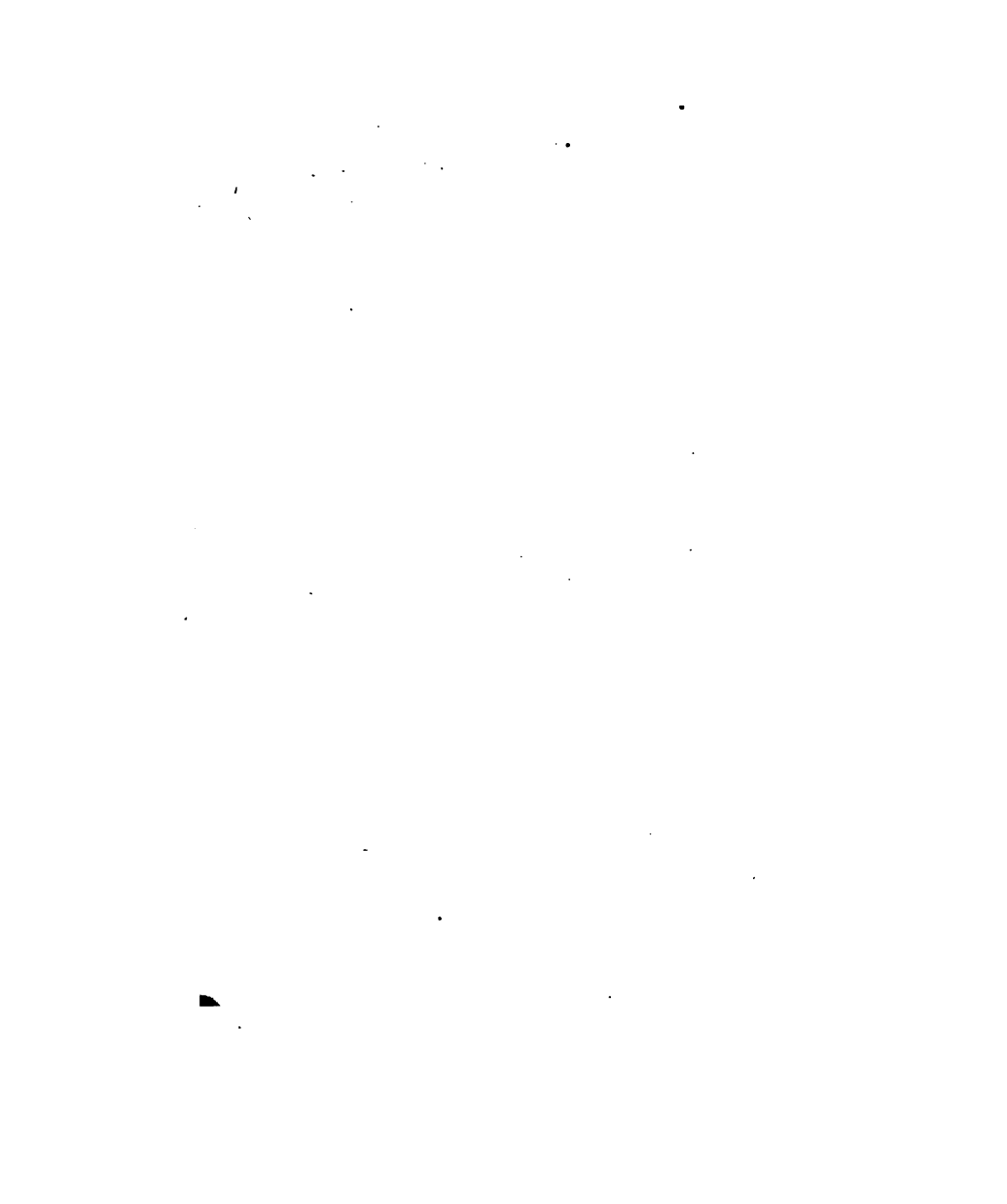
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COLLECTION
OF
BRITISH AUTHORS.
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EL FUREIDIS BY MARIA S. CUMMINS.

IN ONE VOLUME.

Cummins
El Fureidis



EL FUREIDÏS.

BY

MARIA S. CUMMINS,

AUTHOR OF "THE LAMPLIGHTER," AND "MABEL VAUGHAN."

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LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1860, 3

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ADDRESSED TO MR. AND MRS. D., AND DR. C.,
BUT OPEN TO PUBLIC PERUSAL.

Do you remember, my friends, those winter evenings when I sat with you in a certain pleasant library, and listened with attentive ears while you discoursed of past experiences in Eastern lands? Do you remember how, with maps spread out upon the table, you recalled each familiar scene, and introduced me, novice as I was, into the outskirts of that temple of historical and sacred lore in which you were already devotees?

"Always worship the rising sun," was the worldly-wise maxim of an old nurse who exercised a vast influence upon my childhood; and, recalling this favourite motto of my early oracle, I set myself diligently to the study and comprehension of that mystical secret which makes the Orient a charmed land.

In El Fureidis you behold the result. Stanley took me *by the hand*, and led me across Sinai into the *Canaan of promise*. Kelly, with his select band, *next became my travelling companions*. Porter has been *throughout my friend and guide*. Robinson has

the authority to whom I have referred my doubts. I have shared the adventures and perils of Van de Velde. Thompson has unfolded to me the details of Syrian life. Churchill has lured me into the mountains of Lebanon: Chasseaud has by his fascinations compelled me to linger there. Burekhardt has led me into the tents of the Bedouins, and made me a sharer in desert hospitality. Burton has taken me on the sacred pilgrimage. Lamartine has sung for me his sweetest songs.

Here a slice and there a crumb, all these have contributed to satisfy my cravings, and supply my need. I have had chance fellow-travellers too, occasional help-mates, wayside friends. How can I thank them who are too many even to name?

I can but humbly follow their example; and, as they have guided me through scenes of *actual* romance, pleasure, incident, and danger, invite whoever may be so inclined to follow me in my *imaginary* experiences, trusting that there are some in whom I may be so fortunate as to awaken an interest in a land which has aroused my own enthusiasm, and that, pursuing with what patience they may the route which I have trod, they may come at last to feel, like me, at home in El Fureidis.

*13 New Finchley Road,
April, 1860.*

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EL FUREIDIS.

CHAPTER I.

Arrival at Beyrout.

THE sun was setting over that far-famed Eastern land, which, when the Most High divided unto the nations their inheritance, He gave unto his chosen people, — that land which the leader of Israel's hosts saw from afar, though he entered not in, — that land immortalized as the paradise of our earthly parents, the Canaan of a favoured race, the birth-place and the tomb of prophets, the scene of Jehovah's mightiest works, the cherished spot whence the dayspring from on high has visited us, the blessed soil which the feet of the Prince of Peace have trod.

Lazily on the bosom of that classic sea which skirts the shore of Syria there floats a light and graceful bark, whose dreamy motion, as it skims the tide, harmonizes and keeps pace with the sweet and glowing fancies, the unuttered longings, the irrepressible awe, which fill the mind of one who, bound on an Oriental pilgrimage, is now nearing the land of promise, of beauty, of ancient records, and of sacred lore. Englishman that he is by birth, scholar that he has become by study, and philosopher that he fain would be, he forgets, in the scene before him, the race from which he sprang, the learning that has made him wise, the logical reasonings of a well-schooled brain, and, prostrate on the vessel's deck, gives himself up, with all the rapture of a poet's enthusiasm, to the emotion of the hour.

El Fureidis.

The dim and wavy outline of a distant mountain chain, the almost invisible specks upon its sides, and the crest of what seemed at first an airy, floating cloud, are gradually assuming form and colour as the slow-moving vessel draws nearer and nearer to the shore; — and now the cedar-crowned heights of Lebanon stand boldly out to view, clothed in the deep purple light of the descending sun, white monasteries with lofty towers here and there crown the beetling cliffs, and Mount Carmel rears its cone-like peak in a majesty solemn and sublime, while the gilded waters of the Mediterranean fold the whole in a sheet of living flame.

Now feasting his eager eye upon the harmonious picture, then lifting it with equal wonder and delight to the deep-blue canopy of sky above, and anon gazing into the fiery depths below, through which the bark is cutting its trackless way, and all the while breathing in an atmosphere whose purity and fragrance are nowhere else inhaled, the Eastern-bound traveller acknowledges all his longings satisfied, all his day-dreams realized.

The little merchant vessel, bound from Cyprus to Beyrout, boasts but scanty accommodations, — a circumstance of which its solitary passenger is far from being disposed to complain, since he owes to it the exclusive occupancy of both deck and cabin. More especially, as he nears the shore of Palestine, and his soul drinks in the inspiration of the scene and hour, does his English reserve find subject for congratulation in the absence of the restless movements, the jargon of tongues, and the inquisitive eyes, which in recent journeyings have often broken in upon and marred the subjects of his reverie.

The breeze is so light and soft, the air so balmy with a thousand sweets, the sky so serene and cloudless, and the stillness so unbroken, that, lulled into a species of trance, midway between sleep and ecstasy, he experiences, even before *setting his foot on land, something of the luxury of Oriental repose.*

But an Eastern twilight is short, and so was the undisturbed meditation of our traveller. The fading of the purple

light on Syrian hills, and the shooting forth of a galaxy of stars, each one of which was like a brilliant gem starting out from its dark background, proved the signal for a tumult and confusion which formed as strong a contrast to the previous stillness as did the darkness of night to the glories of the sunset hour.

The little schooner had come to anchor about a mile from shore, and was at once surrounded by shoals of boats, manned by Arab boatmen, whose shrill voices and eager gestures, as they climbed the vessel's side, seemed to the startled Englishman little less than demoniac. Thus suddenly roused from Elysian dreams to find himself encompassed by a swarm of savages, of whose importunities he was the sole victim, it may well be supposed that his state of mind suffered a no less sudden transition. He felt himself injured, indignant, and resolved to resist.

But what availed his determined attitude, scornful repulse, and English expostulations, against ignorance of his language and superior physical force? So hopeless, indeed, was the contest with numbers, so evident the necessity of availing himself of one of the small craft which lay alongside, that, summoning all his philosophy, he wisely concluded to conform to the customs of the country, and permit himself to be carried bodily, first to a boat, and then to the opposite shore.

Here new clamours awaited him, — cries of backsheesh, offers of service, and the usual invectives of the disappointed applicants against their more fortunate, because more prompt and energetic, rivals. By the time he reached the comfortable Hôtel de Bellevue, to which his swarthy conductors guided him with ready instinct, his flattering visions of the romance of Eastern life had subsided; the vivid consciousness of his own individuality had become completely restored, and with it the conviction that a good bed, and all the comforts of a sober English home, were vastly preferable to the excited anticipations and painful realities of a country which presented such abrupt and powerful contrasts.

As if to test, however, the conclusion to which his rece-

ad rough experiences had brought him, and prove the truth that discontent is inherent in the nature of man, he now unexpectedly found himself in circumstances calculated to gratify all his national prejudices, and restore him to the normal condition of his being.

Not only was he conducted to a room furnished in the European style, attended by a waiter in European costume, and accosted in the familiar Saxon tongue, but at dinner he encountered a party of English travellers, who had just returned from the stereotyped tour up the Nile and through the most frequented portions of the Holy Land. The party, moreover, included some old friends of his, — a gentleman who had been his fellow-student at Oxford, a lady who had married a connection of his family, and an army officer whom he had met in London. In a word, he found himself restored at once to the familiar atmosphere of home. What more could he ask to fill up the measure of his satisfaction?

And yet, strange to say, this unforeseen encounter only served to bring about a fresh revulsion in his feelings. His countrymen dwelt lightly on the pleasures of their late excursion, talked loudly of its hazards and inconveniences, boasted of their own prowess and indifference to danger, abused the excellent wine of the country, and ended by advising him to secure a dragoman at once, attach himself to a party similar to their own, do up Egypt and Syria in the shortest possible time, and join them in Derbyshire in season of the autumn races.

The ladies talked learnedly of Thebes and the Sphynx, of Baalbec and the hidden treasures of Nineveh, interspersed their quotations from the guide-book with inquiries concerning the Queen's visit to Scotland and anticipations of a gay winter in Paris.

Our fastidious traveller felt an unspeakable thrill of *noyance and disgust*. The conversation was natural, *less, just what might have been expected from the calibre of the individuals*. Its effect, however, was to *once the qualities of his character most antagonistic*

society in which he found himself. The imaginative and poetic enthusiasm of his nature was again aroused. He resolved not only to see Eastern lands, but to imbibe their spirit; and for this purpose he would travel alone, abjure even the companionship of a dragoman, take the least frequented routes, and, above all things, avoid any intercourse with his fellow-countrymen.

Accident seemed to facilitate the execution of this purpose, affording him a prompt opportunity for carrying out his rash and hastily formed project.

His English friends had come from Damascus to Beyrout under the guidance of a professed dragoman, who had in his turn availed himself among the mountain passes of the assistance of a youthful Arab, son of a noted desert sheik. This youth, who spoke English with some fluency, and possessed a perfect familiarity with the route between the two cities, had proved an efficient aid upon the journey, and he now came, late at night, to receive the promised compensation for his services. Hearing that he was about to return the next day by a somewhat circuitous route, our traveller immediately conceived the idea of accompanying him. The reserved Englishman forbore any expression of this intention, being anxious to escape the inquiries and expostulations which would be sure to follow; but, after bidding his unsuspecting friends good-night, he sought the youth, made the necessary contract for safeconduct, and spent the remaining hours until sunrise in hasty preparations for the journey, which was to commence at daybreak.

A written apology and farewell sufficed to acquaint his friends with his sudden departure, though it must be acknowledged that their comments upon the singularity of the proceeding were not unwarrantable.

Nor was it strange that in solemn conclave they summed up those events of his past career which had come under their knowledge, and passed the joint resolution that Meredith had *always been an eccentric fellow, for whose whims there was no accounting.*

CHAPTER II.

Night Journey on the Lebanon.

THE next phase of Eastern life in which we behold our traveller is one of excitement, suffering, and danger. It is the evening of the second day since he left Beyrout, attended only by the youthful Abdoul. Nightfall has overtaken them among the mountains, and the distant thunder betokens an approaching tempest. Worn with fatigue, exhausted and feverish from exposure to the Syrian sun, and riding a horse scarcely less jaded than himself, our hero, despite his love of adventure, contemplates with no little dread the prospect of passing the night, shelterless, and exposed to the fury of the elements. Nor is this the worst he has to fear. Distrust of his guide is superadded to the hardships of the journey, and the senses which would otherwise be benumbed with weariness are now strained to their utmost in apprehension of treachery. Not that Meredith is by nature cowardly or suspicious. On the contrary, he is a model of manly vigour and accomplishments, while the generosity of his own disposition is such as to encourage confidence in others. But it is no ordinary situation in which he finds himself, and various incidents have occurred on the route, calculated to excite him to wariness and prudence.

Both pride and policy, however, forbid his betraying to his Bedouin attendant any symptom of uneasiness, nor, save the simple precaution of keeping constantly in the rear, does he deem it advisable to adopt any defensive measures. Even this prudential order of precedence may be deemed inevitable, since, but for the encouragement afforded by Abdoul's example, the European traveller, skilful rider as he is, would hesitate to spur his horse over the wide chasms, narrow passes, and precipitous descents, which everywhere mark and interrupt their passage. The night is dark, the journey hazardous, and both the gloom and the perils of the way are

every moment becoming more appalling. Now and then pale streaks of lightning illumine the wild scene with their ghastly glare, bringing into bold relief the bare and frowning peaks above, the yawning precipices below, and all the dangers of the rough and flint-strown path, which at one moment skirts the edge of an overhanging rock, then winds along the dry bed of a mountain torrent. The sudden darkness which succeeds, the echoing of the thunder as it resounds from crag to crag, and now and then the roar of a neighbouring cataract, all combine to heighten the awful sternness and grandeur of the place and hour.

Trusting wholly to the sagacity and sure-footedness of his horse, which he no longer attempts to guide, Meredith hails eagerly the lighting flash which enables him to measure the difficulties of the way and scan the face of the youthful Ishmaelite, who successfully veils every emotion, whether of weariness, doubt, or treachery, beneath features of motionless inflexibility. At length, as Meredith finds himself upon a platform of some little breadth, while the steed of Abdoul is already plunging down the fearful declivity which succeeds, the Englishman pauses, and for the first time for some hours addresses the young Arab.

"Abdoul!" he exclaimed.

At the sound of the clear voice ringing through the darkness, Abdoul drew his horse back almost upon its haunches, and with a surprising feat on the part of both steed and rider, the animal was forced to remount the ascent backwards until it gained the level occupied by Meredith.

"Abdoul, the journey is long, the road fearful, and there is a storm coming on."

"Allah! you say truly," replied Abdoul with an unmoved air.

"Where are we to find the shelter for the night?" continued Meredith.

"Behind yonder mountain," — and Abdoul pointed to a precipitous mass of rock, which, as the lightning played over it, seemed within a stone's throw.

"And you will guide me there in safety?"

"Have I not promised? and is not the written contract sealed with the seal of Abdoul?" answered the youth, proudly.

"But do you know the way?" questioned Meredith, who believed himself misled, not being able to credit the possibility that he was pursuing a travelled and recognizable road.

"Does the camel of the desert know the water-spring? and can the eagle find its nest?" said the boy, with gravity.

"But the horses? they are worn out, and cannot carry us much farther."

"Trust them," replied Abdoul; "they will smell their evening meal and the hand that grooms them."

There was a pause. The Englishman forbore further questioning, and the Bedouin, after waiting the word from Meredith, responded to his command to proceed by plunging once more down the cliff.

An hour of patient travelling succeeded; the storm had come on with violence, and the fever which burned in the veins of Meredith had given place to a fearful chill as the cold rain drenched him to the skin. And still the promised destination seemed as distant as ever. It was inconceivable to the Englishman that they should be so long in gaining the place of refuge, which, when pointed out an hour before, had been apparently close at hand. He could not forget the mysterious communication which Abdoul had held the previous evening with some stragglers of a Bedouin tribe whom they had encountered on their road; nor the fierce gesticulations with which the boy had given emphasis to his discourse. While engaged in these and similar reflections, a sound of rushing water fell upon his ear, and he soon became conscious that the path was leading him to the verge of a narrow causeway, beneath which, at a distance of more than a hundred feet, *there formed and dashed an impetuous mountain stream. This causeway was a natural bridge of solid rock, suspended over a terrific chasm, and unprotected by the slightest*

barrier. Thick darkness hid the scene from view; but the roaring of the flood beneath, and the hesitating step of his horse, afforded Meredith sufficient indication of the crisis he had reached in his already sufficient perilous expedition. At the same instant he felt his Bedouin guide tightly grasp his right arm, thus rendering powerless the hand which held his only weapon of defence, a small pocket-pistol.

Confident that the moment had come when resistance was the truest wisdom, he released himself by a sudden effort of strength from the hold of his seeming antagonist, and with a threatening exclamation raised his pistol. At this critical instant a broad, vivid flash of lightning illumined earth and sky, revealing a picture as strange and startling as it was sudden and momentary. In the very centre of the narrow bridge of rock, which hung, as it were, midway between earth and heaven, both horsemen were stationed abreast, having come to a sudden halt. Meredith sat firm and upright in his saddle, Abdoul bent backwards in the position into which he had been thrown by the force of Meredith's sudden repulse, and the eyes of each gazed into those of the other.

Nothing could be more wildly picturesque than the tableau thus presented, nothing more striking than the contrast afforded by the two individuals, each of whom furnished a fitting type of his own race and nation.

The resolute determination which marked both the face and figure of the European, the calm caution and deep-seated distrust evinced both in his countenance and air, were met with equally characteristic indications on the part of the Arab youth, who, with his head thrown back, his thin lips compressed, and his loose garments floating over the verge of the precipice, shot from his eyes such a glance of scorn, that the piercing orbs might have been deemed the central fires from which radiated the mountain lightning.

Not less significant were the words which succeeded this striking *pantomime*.

"*Traitor!*" said the Englishman, between his teeth. "*would you hurl me over the precipice?*"

"Son of an infidel," answered Abdoul, with proud disdain, "the waters of yonder flood are deep, and the caves of the valley are mute as the grave; but the Frank shall tread the mountain pass unharmed, for Abdoul has given his word of faith, and the son of Sheik Zanadeen never lies."

Momentary as were the glances thus exchanged, and short as was the dialogue that followed, the effect was no less instantaneous.

To the Englishman the good faith of the Arab was established beyond a question. The scorn with which he met the charge of treachery, the proud words with which he repelled it, not only carried with them conviction of his fidelity, but excited in the mind of the generous Meredith an involuntary respect and admiration for the true-hearted youth.

The good understanding, however, was far from mutual. The indifference with which the young Bedouin had previously regarded Meredith, had now given place to a sentiment of a wholly different character. Not only had the lips of the Frank branded him with the base charge of traitor, but the lightning flash had revealed to him a countenance, every line of which was darkened with distrust. It was for a moment only, but Abdoul never forgot it.

Maintaining, however, that self-control which marks the Arab even under circumstances of excitement, he quietly resumed his duties as escort and guide, and the next moment sufficed to explain the movement which had alarmed Meredith, and given rise to the misunderstanding. The stone causeway upon which they had halted, although extremely narrow at the entrance, widened, as we have seen, towards the centre, sufficiently to admit of two horsemen abreast. Abdoul had availed himself of this circumstance to fall back to a position parallel with that of Meredith, in order, by aid of voice and arm, to assist him, and encourage his steed in surmounting a *difficult ascent which presented itself at the farther extremity of the bridge.* It was merely to assure himself of the desired *proximity that the youth had in the darkness grasped the*

arm of Meredith; and this fact became evident when, as they actually attempted to climb the smooth, slippery rock, on which the horses could with difficulty obtain a foothold, the jaded animal which Meredith rode stumbled, and would have fallen, but for the assistance promptly rendered by the skilful Bedouin.

This difficulty surmounted, the path became gradually more smooth and practicable, the rain ceased, and the prospects of the travellers appeared more encouraging, though as yet no place of rest and refreshment was visible.

Half ashamed of the doubts and surmises which, although warranted by the occasion, now seemed to Meredith the effects of a heated and distempered brain, he strove to atone for them by manifesting towards his guide the renewed confidence with which the demeanour of the latter had inspired him, and with this view endeavoured to engage the lad in conversation. But Abdoul could not be roused from his taciturnity, and the responses called forth by the questioning of Meredith, although civil, were invariably brief.

They were now descending the mountain whose summit they had crossed earlier in the evening, and the moon, having risen from behind a bank of clouds, afforded an uncertain light which partially illumined the prospect. The craggy heights and bluffs which stretched their huge and shapeless masses in every direction were becoming more thickly wooded and verdant with every step of the travellers' progress, but desolate grandeur was still the predominant feature of the landscape. The path the riders were following led around the slope of a tall, projecting cliff, whose dark, frowning side shut in and barred the prospect, affording only the view of its own pine-clad acclivities above and the deep chasm at its base.

Just as Meredith drew near the point where, by a sudden turning in the road, he might command a view of the opposite valley, a sound fell upon his ear as startling as a trumpet, and as welcome as the voice of a friend. It was the clear ringing note of a deep-toned bell, which, as it reverberated

from cliff to cliff, reassured his heart with its familiar welcome to the abodes of men. Its solemn peals were still vibrating among the hills, when other musical tones burst from a nearer quarter, mingling with the bass notes which rang out from the opposite cliff, — a plaintive minor strain, forming a perfect concord with the deeper and sterner harmony.

Astonishment gave place to awe, as Meredith listened until the sounds died away upon the air, and awe again yielded to an ecstasy of surprise, as turning the angle of the mountain precipice, he beheld at a glance what seemed to his enraptured vision a more than earthly paradise.

Reposing in the heart of the mountain, nestling in the giant arms of Lebanon, a lovely and picturesque village lay before him, its white, flat-roofed cottages gleaming in the unclouded splendour of the now brilliant moonlight.

"Behold!" said Abdoul, checking his horse, and waving his hand in the direction of the highland glen, as if, in presenting it to Meredith, he sealed the fulfilment of his sacred contract, — "behold El Fureidis (the Paradise), the happy valley, — watered by the springs of Barûk, — the home of the mountain-rose, — the garden of Lebanon!"

"A garden indeed!" thought Meredith, as the delicious perfume of herbs and flowers was borne to him on the summer breeze. "Fit place in which to spend a lifetime!" he mentally added, as the sweet repose, the calm serenity of the scene stole in upon his weary senses.

CHAPTER III.

The Village Sanctuary.

And the novelty and excitement of his journey, and the various creeds and nations of which it had presented specimens, Meredith had wellnigh forgotten that it was the evening of the Christian Sabbath.

This recollection was brought to his mind by the familiar sound of bells; but his consciousness of the fact became more vivid as, descending the mountain slope, and drawing near the little highland village, he was struck with the deep and solemn quiet which pervaded the place.

Even the flat roofs of the dwellings, where Eastern households invariably congregate at night, were all deserted. There was no sound to be heard in courtyard or garden, save here and there the musical plashing of a fountain, the distinctly heard play of whose waters rendered the surrounding stillness more impressive.

"They are in yonder church at the evening worship" said Abdoul, replying to the silent interrogation expressed in Meredith's countenance; and, without waiting the word of command, he led the way to the village sanctuary.

It was a building of simple but graceful architecture, perched upon a high projecting platform, and its stone roof and tower of pale yellow limestone gleamed brightly in the moonlight, shedding a glow over the cluster of mountain homes of which it might be termed the crown.

Both travellers alighted at its threshold, and Abdoul, followed by Meredith, entered noiselessly at the door, which stood invitingly open.

Marvellous and touching was the scene which here presented itself. An unwonted awe crept over the heart of Meredith as he gazed and listened, and Abdoul involuntarily assumed an air of respectful attention.

The chief feature in this strange congregation was,

figure of an old man, whose hoary locks fell to his shoulders, and whose long black garments swept the floor of the little platform on which he knelt and prayed. Around him were grouped a crowd of worshippers, whose motley attire, no less than their numerous shades of complexion and varied cast of features, proclaimed them the children of many a different lineage and nation.

Side by side on the marble pavement, the Greek and Armenian, the Turk and the native Syrian, offered up a like petition to the common Father of them all; each head bowed and each knee bent in the same reverent posture, while they listened to the words of one who, in the simplicity of the Christian faith, preached to them the truth as it is in Jesus.

Like the Apostles of old, the aged man seemed to possess the gift of tongues, for his simple offering of prayer and praise was first spoken in English, and then repeated in both Turkish and Arabic, that all might intelligently join in the earnest and devout petition. Not an eye was lifted, not a head raised, until the conclusion of the short but solemn appeal to the throne of grace, and then every voice united in the fervent "Amen!" after which the whole multitude rose and awaited the continuation of the service.

As the noise which accompanied this simultaneous movement died away, a few soft notes of sweet and sacred music stole upon the ear, and the strain gradually swelled in sound and volume until at length the air rang with the rich and vibrating notes of an organ played by skilful fingers. Observing the direction of Abdoul's eager gaze, and the straining of his figure to its utmost height, Meredith availed himself of his own superior stature to peer above the heads of the assembly in the quarter whence the music proceeded; and, although the light which the church afforded was dim and *indistinct, his eye at once detected the rapt and youthful organist. She was a young girl of not more than seventeen years, and of a grace and beauty which, combined with her dress, her attitude, and, above all, the nature of*

her occupation, imparted to her an air of almost seraphic loveliness.

She wore a tight-fitting Grecian bodice of white Damascus silk interwoven with silver, a full flowing skirt of snowy whiteness, and a long veil of the same material thrown over her black hair, after the fashion of the Syrian maidens.

Lost in self-forgiveness, with her head slightly thrown back, and her dark eyes raised, she seemed to be invoking the inspiration to which her fingers gave utterance as they moved slowly over the keys of the instrument. At length, her prelude being finished, she paused, cast her eye upon a group of youthful choristers who stood near, and gathering voice for the effort, struck the first note of a solemn litany, in which they all joined, keeping time to the voice of their leader, and to the accompaniment of the organ.

Sweetly and religiously did the words of the anthem flow from their tuneful lips, and the multitude, in ruder but no less earnest accents, took up the chorus.

“Thou, who dost dwell alone,
Thou, who dost know thine own,
Thou, to whom all are known
From the cradle to the grave,
Save, O save!
From the world's temptations,
From tribulations,
From the fierce anguish
Wherein we languish, —
From the torpor deep,
Wherein we lie asleep,
Heavy as death,
Cold as the grave,
Save, O save!”

As the last notes of the hymn died away, the young organist rose, and with folded hands and downcast eyes awaited the moment when the venerable servant of God should pronounce a blessing upon the assembly.

A solemn silence pervaded the sanctuary while the good man commended each and all to the mercy and protection of their Maker.

Meredith's poetic and imaginative mind, however, realized the beauty more fully than the sacredness of the occasion. His scholarly and artistic nature, more attuned to classical than to religious emotion, failed to recognize in the scene the felt presence of Him who "hath his foundation in the holy mountains."

He saw only a temple reared with hands, and a venerable priest uttering oracular words of wisdom, while, if his heart bowed down in homage, it was to the matchless loveliness of one whom he was ready to liken to the sacred priestess dwelling within the veil. As the congregation filed through the narrow portal at which Meredith and Abdoul had stationed themselves, the former had ample opportunity to scrutinize the incongruous assemblage.

The athletic Maronite, richly and gaily attired, with broad, flat turban and scarlet vest, strode away with a confident bearing, while his fair and comely wife bent her head as she emerged from the door-way whose height scarcely afforded space for her tall tantour;* the self-absorbed and dignified Turk passed on without looking to right or left; and here and there a stern Druse, with his hand on his heavy scimitar, folded his mantle over his bronzed visage, and came stealthily out amidst the crowd.

Meredith lingered to the last, hoping to catch sight of the dark-haired maiden, and Abdoul, whatever might be his motive, stepped within the shadow of a projecting angle of the tower, and braced his slight figure against the wall. The company of worshippers had scattered in different directions, preserving all the while a becoming degree of gravity and decorum, and Meredith began to suspect that the object of his thoughts had left the building by some private door-way, when the sound of a sweet girlish voice fell upon his ear in

** The tantour is a horn of silver, or some inferior metal, which the married women of the Lebanon, both Maronites and Druses wear on the head. It is nearly a foot and a half in height, is sometimes richly bossed, and over it is thrown a long, white veil, thus imparting to wearer a singular, but not ungraceful appearance.*

accents of the purest Greek tongue, and the next moment the beautiful organist made her appearance, leaning on the arm of the gray-haired patriarch of the valley, and followed by a young attendant in Turkish costume, who carried in her hand a curious little paper lantern. The eyes of the maiden were fixed in affectionate reverence on the face of her aged companion, and she passed Meredith without observing him, though the shadow of his figure lay directly across her path. As she descended the steps, however, the breeze swayed the delicate lantern of her attendant, and its light fell full on the face of Abdoul, who as if anxious for concealment, had crouched against the wall.

The girl gave a quick start of surprise as she recognized the lithe figure and handsome, swarthy face of the Arab, and, withdrawing her arm from that of the pastor, she advanced a step towards him, exclaiming, "Abdoul!"

The youth, finding himself thus unexpectedly discovered, straightened his figure to an erect posture; then, pressing his fingers to his forehead, lips, and heart, after the manner of the graceful and dignified salutation of Eastern lands, bowed low before her, uttering her name, "Havilah!"

The tone of his voice, as he spoke that single word, betokened the deepest admiration and reverence; and as he lifted his piercing eyes to her soft and liquid orbs, his face became suffused with an expression of dove-like sweetness, which imparted to it a strange and picturesque beauty.

"You have returned without loss of time," said Havilah, smiling kindly upon the youth.

"The Khádhere* loiters not on the road which brings her master hither," replied Abdoul.

"Abdoul loves Fureidis," said Havilah. "Father Lapierre," and she took in hers the hand of the hitherto unobserved old man, who was gazing up at the stars, "it is Abdoul; he has returned from Beyrout."

The aged missionary looked down, recognized the youth,

* Khádhere signifies white mare.

and laying a hand on his shoulder, exclaimed fervently, "God bless you, my son; you are welcome!"

"Come with us, Abdoul," said Havilah; "my father's house is your home in Fureidis."

"Not so," replied Abdoul. "I have guided hither a stranger from among the Franks; I must provide him shelter."

"Bring him to me," said Father Lapierre; "my house, Abdoul, is the resting-place for the stranger."

"None knows that better than Abdoul," answered the youth, reverently lifting the old man's hand to his lips. Then turning to Havilah, he said, "And the healing mother, Ianthe, is she well?"

A shade passed over the girl's bright features as she answered, "She complains not, but her step is slow, and her cheek paler than ever."

"Has Lebanon no blessed herb," said the youth, — his expressive features full of anxiety, — "that can give comfort to the comforter?"

"Their is a balm in Gilead, Abdoul," said Father Lapierre, fervently, "and in it Ianthe has steeped her soul; the rest she leaves to God."

"Allah preserve her!" exclaimed the boy devoutly.

"We shall see you to-morrow, Abdoul," said Havilah, as she made a motion to proceed on her way.

"And my home, in the mean time, shall furnish shelter and refreshment to yourself and the traveller," added Father Lapierre.

"Your hospitality is well timed," replied Abdoul. "We come thither to-night."

The next moment the old man and the two maidens disappeared down a steep flight of steps cut in the rock; and Meredith and Abdoul, mounting their horses, proceeded by a more circuitous route in the direction of Father Lapierre's humble dwelling.

CHAPTER IV.

The Pastor's Dwelling.

As the church, which was the scene of the good father's priestly labours, constituted the crowning point of the terraced slope to which clung the mountain village, so at the foot of the declivity, overhung by the habitations of his flock, was the spot which the aged man had chosen for the home of his privacy and repose. Fureidis, like most villages of the Lebanon range, was built upon successive terraces or embankments, rude walls of stone having been constructed for the support of the light mould, which was thus protected from the washing of the mountain torrents, and made subservient to cultivation. Hence many of the dwellings in their gradation downwards were completely overshadowed by those of the upper range, it being no infrequent circumstance for the court-yard of one villager to form a perfect level with the flat roof of his neighbour of the succeeding terrace.

From this species of oversight, the cottage of Father Lapierre was happily exempt, being at the foot of an abruptly projecting cliff, and its seclusion rendered still more complete by a thick grove of olive and mulberry trees, which skirted the edge of the precipice. So snugly, indeed, was the little dwelling located beneath the natural parapet of rock, that our weary traveller, having cautiously followed Abdoul down the circuitous bridle-path that led through the village, and now gained a comparatively level space of ground, would impatiently have spurred his horse past the destined resting-place, which he wholly failed to observe, had he not been arrested by the voice of the old man, who had already reached the spot, and was awaiting his guests at the threshold.

As Meredith responded to Father Lapierre's welcoming ejaculation by reining in his horse, and casting around him in the dim light a glance of surprise and inquiry, his venerable host advanced a few steps, and with dignified hospitality to

the Englishman's bridle in one hand, while he stretched the other towards him, saying, "Alight, my son; it has been a wild night, and if you encountered the thunder-gust among the mountains, you must stand in sore need of rest and refreshment."

"Thank you, my kind friend," said Meredith, as he frankly grasped the old man's hand; "I am indeed exhausted, and shall be most grateful for your hospitality."

"You are burning with fever," said the good missionary, as he felt his guest's heated palm. "I fear, too, you have been drenched with the rain," he continued, as he preceded Meredith through the doorway which led into the principal room of his dwelling. "Unless the noise of that telltale waterfall deceive me, Abdoul, the showers have been heavier above than for many weeks past;" and as he spoke, he glanced questioninglly at the young Arab, who, having followed them into the cottage, now struck a light, which sent a feeble glimmer through the apartment.

"The Frank has seen the big clouds burst on Lebanon, and has heard the rushing of the Barûk fountains, which will not soon be dry again," said the boy, as he placed the iron lamp that he had been trimming in a stone niche in the wall, and hastened to obey the calls of his own and Meredith's horses, which were neighing loudly outside.

The old man laid his hand on Meredith's shoulder, felt the dampness of his garments, then, with an expressive gesture, stepped quickly into a sort of shed adjoining the dwelling, and returning with fuel, busied himself in lighting a fire, his guest in the mean time leaning heavily against the rough-plastered wall, and making a curious survey of the unfamiliar objects around him.

Humble as was the home of Father Lapierre, it nevertheless combined not a few elements of interest, since the grandeur of a remote antiquity, the primitive usages of Eastern life, and the refinements of modern civilization were all combined in its construction. The classic pillars and sculptured façade which adorned its portal, no less than the perfect

proportions of its principal apartment, proclaimed it the ruin of some wayside shrine or ancient sepulchre, the origin and use of which were buried among the secrets of the past, and were matters of but little interest to the Syrian peasant, who, in process of time, had found a home within its walls, and added to it the few and unostentatious comforts which his simple life demanded. But if there was a marked incongruity between the remnants of ancient architecture and the rough indications of peasant life and labour, there was a still greater contrast between the Oriental character evinced in all these objects and those evidences of ingenuity and convenience which were conspicuous in the few articles of western use and luxury which the hand of affection, rather than any self-seeking on the part of Father Lapierre, had introduced into the dwelling since he became its occupant.

Thus, as Meredith took a rapid survey of everything within the range of his vision, he scarcely knew whether to feel most astonished at the graceful stone shafts and noble archway, at the earthen fireplace, primitive cooking utensils, and hard clay floor, or at the hanging book-shelves, glazed cabinet of curiosities, and clock of American manufacture, which hung upon the walls; while his aged host, with long black robes and snowy beard, seemed more fully to represent a patriarchal age than anything associated with the present.

The somewhat severe and monastic character of the little domicile, as discerned by the dim lamplight, and the damp, earthy chilliness of the atmosphere within its low stone walls, gave place to comparative cheerfulness and warmth, as the fire which Father Lapierre was but a moment in lighting sent abroad its ruddy glow. And now the old man, with an alertness of movement which seemed to contradict his extremely venerable appearance, applied himself to such other hospitable tasks as the occasion demanded. Lifting a piece of *coarse matting*, which served to divide the apartment from a *small dormitory* in the rear, he disappeared for an instant *then returning with a thick goat-skin burnous over his*

invited his guest to exchange the damp frieze shooting-jacket which he wore for the ample Arab garment.

Meredith would have resisted, but there was a gentle authority in the manner of his host which enforced compliance, and in a moment more the muscular young Englishman, who would have scorned such propositions if otherwise recommended, found himself wrapped in the folds of rough cloth, and seeking temporary repose on the low divan which ran around the room.

Here, stretched at full length, but with no disposition to lose himself in sleep, he watched with interest and curiosity the operations of the missionary and of Abdoul, who returned after a brief absence.

Preparations for an evening repast were evidently going forward. It was the work of but a moment for Father Lapiere to take from his larder the simple articles of refreshment that it afforded, and a bowl of goat's milk, a small vessel containing honey, and a remnant of burghol, or coarse boiled wheat were soon set forth on the clumsy tray, which, mounted on a stool, constituted his only table. Some other cares, however, served to engross him more fully. Opening a small cupboard in one corner of the room, he took from it several packages, examined their labels with precision, then, selecting those which suited his purpose, emptied a portion of their contents into a small mortar. He now retreated into the inner room, where Meredith could distinctly hear him diligently pounding the substance, which, when sufficiently pulverized, was brought to the fire in an earthen vessel, and being mingled with water, was set upon the coals to simmer. The old man, with lamp in hand, was steadily watching the preparation, which began to diffuse an agreeable fragrance through the apartment, and was now and then removing the scum from its surface, when the heavy door turned noiselessly *on its pivot*,* and Abdoul entered. He wore an unmistakable *air of triumph*, and a smile of self-gratulation played round

* Eastern doors, instead of swinging on hinges, usually turn on a *central pivot resting in sockets hollowed in the floor and ceiling.*

his handsome mouth as he took from his head a flat tray of delicious fruit, and removed from his arm a quaintly formed basket, which he proceeded to unpack. The latter contained a cold fowl, a bottle of transparent wine, and some thin crisp cakes, such as constitute the ordinary bread of the country.

Father Lapierre looked up as the youth entered, but offered no inquiries, and manifested no surprise as Abdoul made a tasteful and tempting array of the viands which he had brought. As if considering that the arrangements for the meal were now complete, however, and that he was called upon to serve in his capacity of host, the old man rose from his stooping posture at the fire, and drawing the table into close proximity to Meredith's couch, courteously invited him to partake of the refreshment thus set before him. Meredith, who had risen from his recumbent posture, as he observed his host's intention, hastened to entreat the latter to be seated and share the repast; but this he positively declined, and his guest, with a listless and indifferent air which betrayed but little keenness of appetite, prepared to do honour to the excellence of the fare. His efforts were in vain, however. The pure wine for which the country is justly famed seemed to course through his veins like burning poison, and he experienced only loathing at the first mouthful of the tender fowl, which a few hours earlier he would have devoured with a sportsman's eagerness. The rich grapes alone offered any temptation to his parched lips. He ate a few of them, then leaning his elbow on the table, while his knife and fork lay idly across his plate, he sat for a moment unconsciously gazing into vacancy.

He was roused by the old man's hand placed gently upon his forehead. "It is as I feared," said Father Lapierre; "you are in no condition to prove your ability as a trencherman. It is but poor hospitality which urges food upon one who has no inward promptings;"—and as he spoke, he made a motion to the watchful Abdoul, who silently removed the tray. "You have been exposed to the fever of the country; indeed you are already affected by it, as you and I can both

ceive," added the considerate host, laying his fingers on Meredith's pulse. The speaker paused a moment; then, as if alarmed by the evident severity of his guest's symptoms, exclaimed, "You must take my advice, my son, and go at once to bed. My little cell yonder boasts no luxuries, and my couch is a hard one; but I have prepared you a soothing draught, and I trust you will find your best remedy in sleep."

"Your couch, my excellent friend?" said Meredith, rising with a quick movement, then staggering back, while the dizziness of his brain rendered the objects about him indistinct, — "I cannot think of robbing you of the only bed your house affords; we must seek lodgings elsewhere."

"My couch," said Father Lapierre, in reply, "is any spot where I have space to spread my burnous and stretch my limbs; habit has made me independent of what other men call ease. For yourself, the same chance, or rather Providence, which made you my guest, makes me your medical adviser; and the hakeem of an Eastern village is wont to be implicitly obeyed."

As he spoke, he raised the strip of matting and looped it firmly against the ceiling, thereby disclosing an inner room or closet, which contained only a narrow iron bedstead, a large oaken chest, and a few garments hanging from the walls. "Abdoul will bring your saddle-bags hither," continued he, "and for the present you must content yourself with these narrow quarters, and the assurance that if you cannot enjoy the comforts of an English home, you shall have every care which could be rendered you in your own father's house."

There was something in the old man's dignified and paternal tone of command which bore down all opposition, and Meredith, in his weak and prostrate condition, could only thank him and submit. The traveller's luggage, therefore, was instantly brought, and while he took possession of *his unpretending bedroom*, Father Lapierre returned to the *preparation of that healing medicament of which he had so fully foreseen the use, and which was still steeping over the fire.*

Some hours passed on. The not unpalatable dose had been administered, and had brought to the senses and limbs of the patient a certain degree of repose, though sleep was still far from his eyelids. The fire burned low in the sunken fireplace, diffusing now and then a flickering light through the outer apartment, but leaving the inner in complete shadow. The solemn hush of night was undisturbed save by the monotonous plashing of the neighbouring waterfall, the barking of a village dog, or the sharp cry of a jackal in the distance. But though all within doors was studiously quiet, it was not the quiet of slumber; for Father Lapierre had devoted the night to watching, his anxiety concerning his patient being quickened by the fact that the narcotic had taken only partial effect, and Abdoul had wakened from his first sound sleep to creep near the fire, crouch over it for greater warmth, and spread his thin, slender hands in front of the decaying embers. Thus as Meredith lay motionless on his little pallet, gazing with strained and feverish intensity into the room beyond, the picture which it presented was that of a noble, hermit-like figure, kneeling beside the low divan of the opposite wall, his long, white beard sweeping the pages of an open Bible, and his hoary head resting on his hands, while his heart was engaged in midnight devotion, and — the more striking from his utter contrast with the venerable missionary — the lithe, wiry form of the Arab boy, drawn up so that his arms embraced his knees, his small white turban, gay red vest, and striped abaya brought out in strong relief against a dark background, while now and then the light flame played over his swarthy face, revealing the intense brightness of his eyes, and more than once a fierce scowl, perhaps of malice, perhaps of defiance, shot across his expressive countenance, as he peered eagerly in the direction of the dormitory.

It was but *one* of many visions which passed before the eyes of Meredith during the succeeding weeks that he lay imprisoned on that little couch, and as now the form of the grave old man constituted the calm, strong background to the pic

ture, while Abdoul's keen face and savage glances gave a startling wildness to the scene, so through days of weariness and nights of delirium the presence of the good old priest invariably imparted a sweet sense of repose and serenity to the sufferer, whom the sight of the Arab boy, or the mere sound of his voice, never failed to agitate or disturb. To the excited and feverish brain of Meredith it was as if the one were the herald of sleep and refreshment, the other the harbinger of restlessness and pain; the one, a soothing angel of peace, the other, a disturbing spirit of unrest.

The nerves which had become irritated, and the pulse which had been quickened by the old man's occasional absence, were quieted and subdued from the moment that he re-entered his dwelling; the eyes which had glared with unnatural intensity while watching the motions of the agile youth, were closed in gentle slumber when the calm old man quietly assumed at the bedside the offices of a nurse. On one occasion, when Meredith's fever was at its height, and Father Lapierre had been peremptorily summoned from home, a troop of village children, attracted by curiosity, and unprohibited by Abdoul, took possession of the outer room of the dwelling, and by their juvenile pranks and licensed stares excited the Englishman almost to frenzy. At the return of the pastor, and at his brief expostulation, they readily dispersed; but the harmless little band continued for several days to haunt the brain of the sick man, in whose eyes Father Lapierre was glorified as an angel of light, whose power had put to flight those imps of evil which Abdoul, the prince of darkness, had maliciously conjured up.

And once, once only, when the boy had been sent on a distant mission, when Father Lapierre was reading in his outer room, and when the sick man who had been all day under the influence of a powerful opiate, was supposed to be *still asleep*, the outer door turned gently on its stone pivot, *the glow of the Syrian twilight* gushed in at the aperture, and *there, amid the golden halo*, stood the slender form of a *young girl*, — *the same whom Meredith had seen in the church*

on the first evening of his arrival, who had seemed to him more than humanly lovely then, and who appeared to him now less a woman than a seraph. She spoke, and though her words and her modern Greek accent were unintelligible to the Englishman, her voice charmed all his senses; she smiled, and he read in her face all the heavenly beatitudes. A moment more, and she was gone, and with her went the western sunlight, and gloom overspread the room again.

Day after day, at the selfsame hour, the sick man watched the doorway; but it opened no more to give admittance to the young girl, whose solitary visit became at length to the invalid like one of the visions of his fancy. And as such it was treasured up, and cherished in his memory. Henceforth she mingled in his dreams, and lived in the world of his imagination. She was the spirit of good, walking hand in hand with the old man, adding beauty to his strength. He was a wand of power, she a garment of light; he was a healing influence, she an angel of grace. Against them both, Abdoul and all the agents of darkness were powerless indeed, and, as gradually the fever was allayed, and the invalid progressed in his convalescence, the spectres of evil which had haunted his pillow gave place to the images of sweetness and repose which now had full possession of his soul.

Thus, with Father Lapierre for his physician and nurse, with Havilah for the companion of his thoughts, and the constant, though unknown minister to his wants, and with God's blessing on the efforts of them both, the stranger in this Syrian land found repose in the place of delirium, exchanged sickness for health, and felt his burning fever quenched by the dew of healing.

Was it not typical of a deeper, holier ministry, under whose sacred influence the spirit long tossed with doubt should find a truer rest, the soul sick with vain longings should be satisfied, and life's varied ills should all find their cure at the hand of God's faithful servants, and under the blessing of Him who has promised, "Unto them that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise, with healing on his wings?"

CHAPTER V.

Ayn el Bered.

WHAT newness of life there is in the recovery from long illness, — with consciousness of that secret spring of power and freedom, which glows once more in every member, — what music in the cheerful sound of human voices, so long subdued or hushed to silence in the sick-room, — what eloquence and pathos in the universal voice of Nature, when she first welcomes forth the convalescent!

Especially is this the case when one rouses, as Meredith did, from the torpor of utter prostration, and aided by a constitution of unusual vigour, feels the current of health flow back, not by slow and almost imperceptible degrees, but in a full, strong, gushing tide.

When he first emerged through the arched doorway of his little prison-house, his limbs tottered, and he leaned heavily on the arm of Father Lapierre, who had with some difficulty persuaded him to make an effort to which he believed himself wholly incompetent. But when seated on a fallen column just outside the dwelling, the soft summer air speedily revived him, every fragrant breeze seemed to bring with it new strength, and his mind and body alike invigorated by a sense of contact with the outside world, he felt ready and impatient for new exertions. So rapidly indeed did his elastic system recover its wonted tone, that, so far from encouraging, Father Lapierre now became only anxious to restrain his charge; but it was no longer possible: a few days had sufficed to accomplish a restoration, which a less powerful nature would have required as many weeks to attain; the prisoner had suddenly, and without warning, burst his bonds, and *Meredith felt himself a free man again.*

How beautiful was the scene which lay before him, beckoning on every side, and inviting him to wander forth and explore its hidden recesses!

Mount Lebanon was teeming in all the richness of her summer verdure; her choicest flowers were sending forth their perfume, and fruits of every clime were ripening in the sunshine of her vales. The rich plains at her feet were rejoicing in their wealth of waving grain, and her terraced slopes were promising to the husbandman that still more precious harvest which the olive and mulberry grove yields. The gushing sound of waterfalls proclaimed the existence of those pure, refreshing springs, which carry richness and fertility in their course, and the lofty mountains, which hemmed in the prospect, held out an irresistible temptation to climb their summits, and catch glimpses of the picturesque views beyond.

Nor was Meredith slow in obeying nature's summons. His newly acquired strength was each day tested to the utmost, his feet urged on and his weariness beguiled by the novelty, strangeness, and bewildering beauty which were disclosed at every step, and oftentimes he was only reminded of his weakness when finding himself stretched in utter exhaustion upon some moss-grown rock, or in the shade of some spreading tree.

His first essay at pedestrian exercise brought him within the precincts of the village, and a part of the succeeding day was spent in strolling among its cultivated terraces. Nor was there here any lack of novelty and diversion for the stranger. The picturesque costume, rude songs, and curious implements of the peasants at work in their gardens and mulberry plantations, the various domestic occupations which the women were carrying on in the open air, together with the industrious rearing and feeding of the silkworms, which were the chief object of the housewives' care, all combined to arrest the traveller's attention, and agreeably occupy his thoughts.

His observations could not, however, be carried on without his becoming, in turn, an object of curiosity and interest to the simple villagers. All eyes turned upon him as he walked, labour suddenly ceased wherever he made his appearance, children dogged his footsteps, and lean dogs barked at him

from every court-yard, creating a degree of publicity so distasteful to his reserved character, that he finally turned his back upon the little hamlet, with a resolve to abjure its vicinity on future occasions.

The next morning, therefore, he took his course in a contrary direction, and following a little goat-path, plunged down a deep ravine, which stretched in front of Father Lapierre's dwelling, and at the bottom of which wound the clear mountain stream, the murmur of whose waterfall was audible within the cottage, and constituted, as we have observed, the old man's barometer.

On the opposite side of the deeply wooded gorge, the mountains rose with unusual abruptness, and although covered at their base with luxuriant vegetation, their sides were almost destitute of verdure, save where the hand of industry had improved the spare soil, and their tops presented a stern, bare surface, which formed a severe outline against the clear blue sky. Half-way up one of these giant slopes, and only separated from El Fureidis by the deep cleft in the mountains, was an ancient, irregularly-built convent, scarcely distinguishable from the huge mass of rock which had furnished the material for its construction, and out of the heart of which it had been partially hewn. From every point of view the convent was a prominent and striking feature in the landscape: it was the deep-toned bell of its high tower which had sounded Meredith's first welcome to El Fureidis: he had in the earliest hour of his release from illness been attracted by the picturesque old eyry, and it now furnished the object and motive of his morning's excursion.

But despite his experience on his recent journey, he had yet to become convinced of the deceptions peculiar to these mountain districts, where the existence of a narrow gorge, or empty river-bed, may place weary miles between places apparently within a stone's throw of each other.

Thus he toiled on for some time, at first with buoyancy and zest, as occasional openings in the landscape revealed *the convent*, apparently within half an hour's walk, then with

an air of languor and fatigue, as, after descending many a precipice, and climbing many an ascent, he lost sight of the building altogether, and began to suspect that it was still far distant. He had crossed the little winding stream so many times that he had become bewildered, and uncertain whether it were the right or the left bank which he ought to pursue, and at length, having reached a point where the goat-path that he had been following suddenly ceased, he paused and looked around him for some landmark by which to direct his steps. The footprints of various animals were here and there discernible, but they crossed each other in different directions, giving no indication of an accessible route. Far up on the slope above him, however, he could observe a flock of sheep, climbing the mountain-side in long single file, and resolving to follow these dumb guides, he set out anew, confident in the belief that they would lead him into the vicinity of the convent sheepfold.

It was now high noon. The sun, from which the thick shade of the valley had hitherto protected him, beat mercilessly upon his head, as he toiled across barren slopes and around flinty ridges, still keeping in view the flock of noiseless-footed animals, and following the long fleecy line, as one might follow in the white wake of a steadily receding ship. The consciousness of his recent illness, and of his still diminished strength, began now to force itself upon him, and his curiosity to visit and explore the Maronite convent was lost in the stronger and more immediate desire to gain some shady retreat, where he might rest awhile before proceeding on his way.

It was with no slight satisfaction, therefore, that, as he rounded a little point behind which he had a moment before lost sight of his fleecy convoy, he beheld one of those basins of verdure which are sometimes found even at great altitudes among the mountains, and towards which the sheep, having now broken into a full run, were hastening with a speed which betokened the refreshment they anticipated beneath its shade.

With equal eagerness, and an accelerated pace, Meredith followed, and without caring farther to pursue the sheep, which speedily disappeared in the thicket, he threw himself down on a flowery bank under the shade of a huge wild oak and baring his temples to the breeze, indulged in the long, free respiration which relieves the frame overtaxed by exercise and fatigue.

How long he lay here he scarcely knew; indeed, he could not be sure that he had not fallen into a light slumber, when he was startled by a slight crackling sound, as of some one parting the bushes which formed a complete undergrowth in the vicinity of his resting-place. Bethinking himself of his need of a guide, and supposing this might be the shepherd in search of his stray flock, he suddenly raised himself on his elbow and uttered a loud "Halloo!" The sound had scarcely left his lips, when he distinguished, just above his head, a footfall scarcely heavier than that of a hare or an antelope, and with a light bound, a figure stood before him, which caused him to spring to his feet, and stand for an instant almost paralyzed with astonishment. It was so like the young girl whom he had seen, clothed in white, in the village church, and who, similarly attired, had dawned upon him like a vision in his sick-room, that he was sure he could not be mistaken as to her identity; and yet it was so unlike the creature of his imagination and his dreams, that he half suspected his senses were playing him false. Her long white robe was exchanged for a full skirt of the striped silk-and-wool material common among the Arabs, and which, terminating above the ankle, displayed her neatly fitting little boot of red Damascus leather. She wore a jacket of scarlet cloth, and in place of the long white muslin veil, a gay kefiyeh, or striped handkerchief, fantastically bound around her head, its long pointed ends, with their deep silken fringe, shading *each side* of her face.

Beside her, attendant on her slightest motion, was a small, graceful gazelle, whose large, dark eyes, invariably following those of his mistress, seemed to impart to her a

double power of observation, and aided not a little in disconcerting Meredith, who, as he sprang to his feet, found himself face to face with both pair of melting orbs. Had Diana herself, attended by one of her wood-nymphs, suddenly burst from the thicket, Meredith could scarcely have experienced any greater awe and amazement than that which took possession of him at this sudden and unlooked-for appearance of Havilah and her little companion. He commenced an awkward and stammering apology for his rude shout to the supposed shepherd, but was interrupted and still further embarrassed by a sweet, child-like laugh, a spontaneous gush of merriment, which at once betrayed the young girl's natural and innocent consciousness of the surprise her presence occasioned.

"I am a stranger," he once more began; "and" — He checked himself abruptly, as the thought darted through his mind that she could not probably comprehend a word of English, or any other language he had at command. He now actually coloured with confusion, for Meredith, the student, the traveller, the man of thirty, was a novice in female society, and utterly free from vanity in respect to the sex. Moreover, despite the animation of Havilah's manner, and the peculiarity of her dress, which imparted to her a singularly youthful appearance, he could not forget the sanctity with which he had hitherto regarded her, nor the spiritual influence which her presence had exercised upon him.

The unsophisticated mountain girl was, however, far from sharing his embarrassment. She did not even seem to perceive it, but, responding merely to the doubt expressed in his countenance, said with frank simplicity, — speaking in his mother tongue, with merely that slight shade of accent which proved it was not habitual to her, — "I understand, — I speak English, — and it is the English stranger, Father Lapierre's guest, whom I am happy to have the honour of seeing in *Fureidis*." She bent her head gracefully as she thus saluted him, and though Meredith's curiosity regarding her continued unsatisfied, he felt that no studied reception cou

El Fureidis.

be more courtly or more dignified than that with which this young creature, half child, half woman, thus acknowledged his acquaintance, and welcomed him to her mountain home.

Reassured by the familiar language and usages with which an Englishman, least of all men, knows how to dispense, he bowed, thanked her, and added, "I left Father Lapierre's cottage this morning for the purpose of visiting the convent. I have been wandering for some hours through the valley, and when I shouted so loud, it was in the hope of hailing a guide, for I find myself completely lost among your hills."

"Not lost," exclaimed she, with an arch expression of amusement at the fruitless circuit he had made, and his ignorance of the present locality; "for, see! we are close to the village."

As she spoke, she darted through the woods, waving her hand, and beckoning him to follow her. So rapid was her movement, that ere he could part the thick undergrowth sufficiently to admit his tall form, she had gained the extremity of the little thicket, and when he emerged from the wood she stood awaiting him on the verge of a giddy precipice, which overhung a deep valley below.

At one point of this mountain height a huge mass of rock stretched itself above the gorge, projecting its sharp angles and slender needles of flint into mid-ether, and apparently offering no foothold save to the birds of the air. Giving one glance back to see if she were observed and followed, Havilah mounted this wild acclivity with a step as light and fearless as that of the gazelle by which she was closely pursued; without pausing to take breath, or measure her course, she scaled, one after another, each intervening cliff, and faltered not until she stood on the outermost projection, a thin surface of table-rock, which overhung the abyss at a fearful angle. Startled at her temerity, and trembling for her safety, Meredith, himself expert in mountain exercises, followed as he best might, but *soon found himself distanced* by her nimble foot; and when at

length he beheld her, just floating, as it were, on the edge of the giddy parapet, he half believed her some mountain sprite, and expected that the next moment would see her vanish into nothingness.

A touchingly human expression overspread her countenance, however, as, looking up to address a word to her companion, she observed him standing at some little distance, pale with the efforts he had made, and struck dumb by horror at her perilous position. Wholly mistaking the cause of that hesitation, which forbade him to venture on the thin platform of rock that seemed scarcely capable of sustaining her own light weight, and noticing only his sudden pallor, she unconsciously relieved his agitation on her account by at once deserting her exposed post; and hastening to his side, she exclaimed, in a tone of regret and anxiety, "You are ill; I have been very thoughtless; I quite forgot how ill you had been."

"O no," answered Meredith, at once deprecating her sympathy; "I am well, perfectly well, except as you make me sick with fears for your safety. I trembled lest that slender ledge of rock should give way beneath your feet."

"What! the rock? the Falcon Perch give way?" replied she. "O no, it is as firm as the heart of the mountain. M. Lapierre and my father often sit there together to watch the coming storm, and Ayib and I come hither to see the purple sunsets and the rainbows;" — and she laid her hand affectionately on the head of the little animal by her side, who, as if catching his mistress's expression, seemed to peer into Meredith's face with an air of tender concern. "But you are fatigued," continued Havilah, evidently unconvinced by Meredith's emphatic assertions; "we will return home. I only wished to show you how near we are to a place of rest and shelter. The village is just beneath us: let us go there at once."

"Not until I too have mounted the perch, and taken one look into the valley," said Meredith, pressing eagerly forward, *now that she began to urge him to retrace his steps.* With

simple earnestness she held out her hand to assist his progress; but his sensitive pride had taken alarm at the possible imputation of cowardice or weakness on his part, and feigning not to observe her proffered aid, he bounded forward, with an agility which would have done credit to a chamois-hunter, and in an instant stood erect on the giddy eminence, which a moment before he had shuddered to see Havilah occupy.

Lost, however, was all sense of personal mortification, or triumph, as, gazing from his eyry-like position, he saw spread below him, like a little amphitheatre, the village which he had left in the morning and perceived at a glance that, having nearly made the circuit of the place, he now approached it from an unexpected quarter, and obtained of it a more extended view than had yet been afforded him. Hitherto his observations had been limited to the dwellings of the peasants, and the village church, which stood on the topmost terrace above them. Now the first thing which struck his eye was a tall, narrow building with a high bell-tower, which he at once recognized as one of the silk-factories common to the district; and near it, embosomed in a grove of fruit and ornamental trees, a tasteful house and gardens, evidently the residence of some European family. The neat white villa was separated from the factory and its unsightly appendages by a thick mulberry plantation; but all were evidently the property of one owner, being built on a succession of similarly constructed terraces, and divided from the more ancient village by a clear, impetuous stream, which gushed down the mountain-side in a foaming cascade, then, rapidly coursing through its narrow bed, turned the wheel of the modern factory, as well as that of an old olive-mill on the opposite bank.

"My father's silk factory," said Havilah, as, having watched Meredith's eye, while it roamed delightedly over the fair prospect, she observed him glance at the tall building, and turn towards her with a look of inquiry, and ere the words *by which* she had anticipated his questioning had passed her *lips*, the tower-bell sounded the hour of noon, and the work-

people streamed through the doorway and separated to their dwellings.

"My father will be at leisure now for the rest of the day," continued Havilah, after a moment's pause, "and my mother will expect us yonder to the noonday meal," — and she waved her hand in the direction of the villa. "Come with me; the stranger has always a welcome there."

As she spoke she turned to depart, and Meredith followed her in silence, a new light having dawned upon him concerning the probable birth and station of his lovely young acquaintance and guide.

They soon regained the little thicket, and Havilah struck at once into a pathway which wound gradually downwards. They had proceeded but a short distance, however, when they reached a little opening in the woods, an oasis of flowers and verdure, which presented at the moment of their approach a scene of picturesque novelty and pastoral beauty, such as were associated in the mind of our traveller with patriarchal ages, in the primitive life of the world. Beneath the ruins of an ancient grotto, a fountain of crystal water gushed from the living rock, danced and leaped awhile in the ever brimming basin beneath, then rippled away to swell the gurgling streams which everywhere ran among these fruitful hills. Two immense watering-troughs stood near, which it was the care of the villagers daily to fill for the use of the animals pastured on the heights above. A couple of Syrian peasant-girls had just completed this task at the moment when Meredith and his companion approached the spot, and now sat leaning on their heavy water-jugs, idly watching the flock of sheep which had been Meredith's unerring guides, and which crowded and pressed around the troughs, where they were eager to slake their noonday thirst. The two damsels started up as they caught sight of the new comers, drew their white veils partially across their faces, made a formal salutation to the stranger, and busied themselves with alacrity in dispersing the sheep in the neighbourhood of the fountain, in order to

clear a passage for Havilah, to whom they evidently looked up with sincere and affectionate respect, while they laughingly responded to some playful remark which she addressed to them in their native language.

Meredith now perceived for the first time that Havilah carried in her hand a little pitcher, of antique form, and at once divined the purpose of her excursion, which was doubtless to fill the vessel at the clear, cool spring. He thought of the maidens of ancient Scripture and of classic lore, and wondered if ever a daughter in Israel, or a Delphic virgin, was half so beautiful as she looked when kneeling for a moment beside the fountain, or when rising and inviting him to taste the water of the thrice-blessed spring.

"How delicious! how pure! how icy cold!" he exclaimed, as, after imbibing a refreshing draught, he removed the pitcher from his lips, dashed the remainder of its contents on the grass, and, refilling, presented it to the young girl, whose face glowed with pleasure at his praise of her favourite fountain.

"It is the freshly melted snow of Lebanon, filtered through crystal and spar," said Havilah. "We call it Ayn el Bered (the ice-cold spring). M. Lapierre ascribes to it marvellous virtues; my father calls it our native Champagne; to my mother it is more welcome than sherbet. She will thirst for it now that the dinner-hour draws near, and I must be in haste." So saying, she turned into the abruptly descending path, and carrying her brimming pitcher with a steady hand, proceeded at so rapid a rate that Meredith could scarcely keep pace with her flying feet, and had no opportunity to relieve her of her light burden. She paused at length beneath a cluster of fig-trees, which, with the tangled vines that interlaced their boughs, formed a complete arbour at the entrance of the village, and waiting an instant for her companion's approach, pointed to a little foot-bridge just beyond, exclaiming, "Yonder come M. Lapierre and my father."

Meredith glanced in the direction indicated, and at once recognized his aged friend, accompanied by an individual who, although he made no claim to British origin, might well have been mistaken by the Englishman for one of his own countrymen. He was somewhat beyond middle life, and his person, though below the medium height, was robust almost to corpulency; still his step was elastic, and his every movement and gesture betokened force and nervous energy. He wore the European costume, with the exception of a red tarboosh, which sat low on his forehead, but suffered a few locks of iron-gray hair to escape and cluster round his temples. Nothing could exceed the good-humour which reigned in his round, florid face. It was one of those countenances on which all the social virtues seem written. One felt at a glance that here was a man who never wore a mask; a man whose frank, confiding nature revealed itself in every feature; a man whom the world might disappoint, but could never sour, — whom his fellow-men might defraud, deceive, betray, but could never teach distrust.

It was next to impossible that such a man should bestow other than a cordial greeting even upon a stranger.

As Havilah approached, a few steps in advance of Meredith, and whispered a word in her father's ear, he patted her head approvingly, gave an expressive nod, then came forward with both hands outstretched. Every friendly assurance, every pledge of future hospitality, were conveyed in the warmth with which he now saluted the Englishman, not as an alien, a passing tourist, a possible intruder, but as his own acknowledged and honoured, though hitherto unknown guest.

Meredith was surprised out of his habitual reserve. The customary barriers, whether of diffidence, indifference, or pride, with which he was wont to protect himself from social contact, gave way before the heartiness of his new friend's words and manner, and almost to his own astonishment, he found himself responding to them with a grateful cordiality

such as had never been called forth by the vast amount of adulation which had been wasted upon him from his boyhood.

"I have been absent in Damascus during the past week," said the silk manufacturer, "or our good father would not so long have enjoyed exclusive possession of his guest. It is now my turn."

"You have wandered too far on the mountains, my son," interposed M. Lapierre, his eye resting with some anxiety upon his patient; "you are overwearyed."

"We have all done our day's work, I suspect," said Meredith's self-appointed host; "you among your parishioners, M. Lapierre, I among my workpeople, and Mr. — I beg your pardon, sir —"

"Meredith."

"And Mr. Meredith upon the mountains. So now to dinner, or Mother Ianthe will be impatient, and will send her little Turkish damsel in search of us."

As he spoke, he drew the Englishman's arm within his, and they took their way through the mulberry grove, in the direction of the little white villa, Meredith cheerfully assenting to the invitation, but looking round in vain for Havilah, who was nowhere to be seen. Neither her father nor M. Lapierre, however, appeared conscious of her absence, and Meredith forbore making any comment on the sudden disappearance of one whose rapid movements were evidently as independent of all outward restraint, as her manners were free from any other rules of etiquette than those imposed by her own native grace and dignity.

CHAPTER VI.

The Missionary and the Manufacturer.

THE dwelling of the silk-manufacturer was an inexpensive structure of white limestone, which, with its adjacent offices, occupied no less than four artificial terraces, a circumstance that imparted singular irregularity to the miniature villa, and added not a little to its picturesque effect.

Although a favourable slope had been selected, and the terraces were of a breadth unusual in the Lebanon, the level surface thus afforded was inconsiderable, the platform on which the main building rested being only about twenty feet wide, and the embankments successively diminishing in the direction of the valley. Inconvenient as such a foundation might be deemed in a practical point of view, nothing could exceed the advantages it afforded in respect to pure air, sunshine, and mountain scenery. The long narrow saloon which constituted the principal apartment, and which, enclosed on three sides only, lay open to the prospect, presented in itself an unrivalled landscape observatory. The little wings, including one room each, which stretched from it at right angles, though at a less elevation, commanded the same wide expanse of garden, vineyard, and plain; the occupants of the kitchen and laundry were but one degree less favoured; and even the rustic stable-boy, as he groomed his master's horse, which was lodged on a lower terrace still, could overlook the labours of the Syrian ploughman in the grain-fields of the distant Bekaa.

The exterior of the manufacturer's mansion, like that of most Eastern houses, was severely simple, presenting a bare surface of wall, nowhere more than two stories in height, and its monotony occasionally broken by a latticed window, introduced without the slightest regard to uniformity. The care and taste, however, of which the building was outwardly devoid, had been freely lavished on the inner court-yard and its surrounding saloons and alcoves, which, in this favour

climate, constituted the reception rooms and chosen retreats of the household during the warm hours of the day. Here Nature and the hand of man had been profuse in their gifts and adornments. The little enclosure was a garden of beauty and sweetness, choicest exotics and rarest shrubs vying with the native products of the soil in the richness and luxuriance of their growth. The rustic archways above the steps conducting from one terrace to another were complete arbours of clematis and wild woodbine, and the slender pillars supporting a light veranda which ran around the inner wall of the dwelling were enwreathed with the jessamine and the rose.

In the centre of the garden, embowered amid orange-trees and oleanders, a fountain sent up its graceful jet, lulling the ear with the continual play of its waters; birds of every hue sported among blossoming plants, or perched boldly on window-sills and within doorways, now and then telling the story of their happy, protected lives in a gay burst of song. Add to all this purity of the summer air, and the mingled fragrance continually going up like incense, and it may well be believed that this was a spot endowed with power to charm all the senses into an Elysian repose.

So thought Meredith as, the noonday meal being passed, he half reclined on the low, silken divan that stretched around the open alcove where the table had been spread, and in the intervals between puffing at his perfumed narghileh looked abroad upon the entrancing prospect, and within upon the scene of domestic peace, of which in this strange land he found himself a partaker.

The host and his guests had been joined at dinner by Havilah's mother, the Mother Ianthe, as she was familiarly termed by the primitive people of the region. She came leaning on the arm of her daughter, and wrapped in a thick cashmere shawl, which alone indicated the extreme delicacy of a constitution that could not endure exposure to a breeze so gentle as that which pervaded the apartment. One needed to bestow but a moment's glance on the mother to see whence the mountain girl inherited the spiritual expression which at

times imparted such holy sweetness to her face. Nothing could exceed the elevated, the almost unearthly sanctity which marked the countenance, the manner, and even the voice of the slender, shadow-like woman, the marble pallor of whose face seemed enhanced by the brilliancy of the dark lustrous eyes, and whose black, wavy hair dropped over her sunken cheek as if it were a mourning badge, a token of the decay of her early bloom. There was no undue claim to sympathy, however, no affectation of weakness in the gentle hostess-like manner of the invalid, who, although she spoke English but imperfectly, made a successful use of her knowledge of the language in welcoming Meredith under her roof, accompanying her broken words with a kindness of tone and earnestness of gesture which left little for the tongue to express.

She sat but a short time at the table, ate sparingly of the simplest food, partook of no other beverage than the water of her favourite spring, and soon retired, accompanied by Havilah, leaving the gentlemen to conclude the repast at their leisure.

They lingered awhile over the variety of choice fruits which constituted their dessert: but the table was at length removed, pipes were brought, and Meredith, following his host's example, applied himself, for the first time, to the enjoyment of the narghileh, M. Lapierre, who declined the use of this Eastern luxury, engaging with none the less zest in the conversation which it favoured, and which now flowed in as easy and steady a current as the light streams of smoke which went curling upward.

The countenance of the middle-aged man of the trio would at this moment have soothed the misanthrope and furnished a rebuke to the sceptic in the benevolent traits of humanity. Men accustomed to mingle in crowded circles, to jostle against their equals at every turn, to feel oftentimes disgust and weariness at the daily requisitions of social life, can form but a feeble conception of the almost rapturous joy with which an individual to a great degree exiled from his fellows hails the

stranger, the traveller, or the pilgrim, who becomes for the time a link between him and the great world from which he is shut out. To the silk-manufacturer, labouring in his little sphere, the arrival of the Englishman, his illness and consequent detention in El Fureidis, so far from being matters of indifference, were subjects of deep personal interest and excitement; and now, to see the invalid restored, to welcome him under the hospitable roof, to share with him in friendly converse, and glean from his lips tidings of the civilized races which he represented, were to the honest host all-sufficient causes of congratulation and thanksgiving. Thus his ruddy face glowed with no common satisfaction and pleasure, as, leaning back on his cushioned divan, enveloped in a thick cloud of smoke, he discussed with Meredith various questions of European life and politics, or, voluntarily relinquishing the field to his aged friend, listened to the animated dialogues of M. Lapierre and the Englishman, with that unqualified and genuine attention observable only in the unselfish and simple-hearted.

They were no ordinary men with whom, in this remote corner of creation, Meredith had by a singular combination of circumstances, been brought into familiar relations.

A brief acquaintance with the venerable missionary would have sufficed to indicate, even to the most careless observer, that behind his present life of humble labour and patient self-sacrifice there lay a long and varied experience, rich in learning, research, incident, and travel, possibly in romance, adventure, and those struggles of the heart which not infrequently give a colouring to the after career. Whatever might have been the outward vicissitudes of his lot — and his thorough and widely extended knowledge of the world proved them to have been manifold, — whatever might have been his inward warfare — and the depth of his human sympathies *proclaimed it to have been keen and strong, — this much only was known of him with certainty.*

Born of French parentage, and trained in the best schools of erudition, he had early attained such masterly scholarship

and developed such mental resources as promised that he would one day hold a brilliant position in the learned and scientific world. At the very point, however, when earthly success held out its most tempting allurements, he had, actuated by some strange and unaccountable impulse, thrown himself into the arms of the ancient Church in whose tenets he had been educated, and devoting the treasures of his intellect and the powers of his ardent nature to the service of that religious order, over whose superstition and bigotry charity draws the veil of a loving admiration for its self-sacrificing zeal, he had set forth to preach the cross.

We may not tell how much of human passion, of disappointed hope, of wild desperation, mingled with diviner and more sanctified emotions in fostering his ardour for that crusade which commissioned him not alone as the Christian soldier, but as the bold voyager, the undaunted adventurer, the skilful pioneer of civilization and discovery; nor may we tell when or how, amid what Kamtschatkan snows, or under what African suns, the man who was wrestling for God and truth found the first ray of peace to his own soul. It is enough that light shone at last upon his mental vision, that with its earliest dawn he threw off the ecclesiastical shackles by which he had hitherto been bound, and that, receiving the Gospel like a little child, he acknowledged Christ as his only master, and all men as brethren. Then it was that he turned his pilgrim feet to the sacred soil of Palestine, chose out his little field of labour, and, under the seal of a new commission, proclaimed a pure and simple faith on the hill-tops and in the valleys of that goodly mountain, Lebanon.

He was a rare and noble object, that vigorous old man. The fire of his eagle eye, which had once glowed with all the vehemence of an ambitious youth, was subdued, not quenched, by the gentle influences of a holy and chastened old age. The lofty brow, once marked by the storms of life, and furrowed by *its cares*, had long since been smoothed by the gentle hand of *patience*, and had become the placid seat of elevated thought and purposes all divine. The features, once regular and fa

had gained in benignity what they had lost in symmetry of outline, and shaded as they were by the long, white beard, reminded one of the mellow beauty of autumn, dimly discerned amid winter's snows. His iron frame, too, how grand and imposing it was! his step, how firm and elastic! his senses, how quick and discriminating!—all telling of a sound original constitution, which hardship and exposure had but served to confirm and invigorate. He must have been an awe-inspiring man once, before humility cast her mantle over his earth-born pride; but now fear gave place to love in the presence of one whose physical power, whose mental energy, whose intellectual greatness, were all softened and sanctified by a childlike simplicity of spirit.

A greater contrast, and yet a more perfect harmony could scarcely be conceived than were exhibited by this venerable shepherd of souls, and the active enterprising head of temporal labours and secular interests at El Fureidis. The one had earned a calm repose as the meed of his life-struggle; the other enjoyed the cheerful contentedness of a nature to which life had scarcely been a struggle at all. The one had fought his way through youth and manhood, to win in his ripe old age the simple faith of a child. The other had not reached middle life without his share of human vicissitudes; but they left him, as they found him, *always* a child, — a child in light-hearted good-humour, in ignorance of the world, in unquestioning credulity, in all the unsophisticated qualities of a genial, confiding disposition.

This Augustine Trefoil, the silk-manufacturer, was a happy man. A less buoyant nature than this would have sunk beneath half the load of misfortunes which had fallen to his lot; but what would have been ruin to another man was to him but the spur to fresh enterprise and renewed activity.

Born of American parents, amid the mountainous districts of New England, he had been endowed, both by inheritance and by early training, with a hardy constitution, cheerful temperament, quick perceptions, and especially that indomitable perseverance and energy which are such marked

traits in the American character. All these qualities were early brought into action from the circumstance that, when Augustine was yet a boy, his father (a man of restless spirit) obtained an Eastern consulship, took his son abroad with him, and, dying soon after, left the youth to his own guidance and resources. His mother and two little sisters had been buried years before beneath the New England sod, and the boy possessed no relatives to whom he was in any degree responsible. His habit of life had already rendered him a cosmopolite. Domesticated, however, in a French household, and received soon after his father's death, into a French commercial establishment, circumstances and his perfect use of the Gallic tongue occasioned him to be so identified with France and her interests that his true descent was wellnigh forgotten, and on reaching manhood he was invariably styled "Monsieur."

It was astonishing how rapidly, despite his youth, this Franco-American commenced mingling among men, how quickly he contrived to form projects, plan commercial alliances, and invest his little patrimony in speculations that promised quick returns. It was less astonishing, all things considered, that he should have been again and again deceived by those whom he trusted, that his projects should, one after another, have failed, and his capital been squandered.

But Augustine was not discouraged. New schemes arose upon the ruins of the old; partial success at times attended them; but for the most part they were built upon some impracticable basis, and ended in failure. Thus years were spent in the vain endeavour to realize the wealth which constantly dawned before the mental vision first of the boy and then of the man, but as constantly eluded his grasp.

Precisely at the point when his fortunes were at their lowest ebb, his honest heart, which through many long years *had found no object on which to lavish its wealth of affection, became fixed upon Ianthe, the beautiful daughter of a Greek merchant, resident at Smyrna.* With his usual improvidence

he hesitated not to urge his suit, though its object was one of a numerous and unportioned family, and he was ignorant of his own next stepping-stone towards wealth. Here the man of many disappointments was singularly successful; and Ianthe, young, confiding, and warmly reciprocating his attachment, hesitated not to unite her destiny with his, and share his uncertain lot.

Augustine had other warrant beside that of Scripture for believing that in Havilah "there is gold; and the gold of that land is good." Thither he went with his young bride, once more to waste his energies in vain toil, and see his airy visions gradually melt into nothingness. The only treasure which the husband and wife brought back from the Indian soil whence they had hoped to reap a plentiful harvest was an infant daughter, a pure gem of beauty and promise. In their eyes, she was more precious than all the silver and gold hid within the mines of Havilah; they gratefully gave her the name of the land, and, rejoicing in this gift of Heaven, lamented not the lesser gifts which earth had denied them.

It was the failure in Ianthe's health which directed their steps towards Lebanon, that favoured region, the unutterable perfection of whose climate gives promises of restoration to the invalid who would perish beneath less gentle and life-giving breezes. Here attentively watching the peasants at their toil, the ingenious and enterprising mind of Augustine saw how easily, by the aid of modern invention and a limited capital, machinery might be substituted for hand-labour, and the originator of the scheme be placed at once on the road to fortune.

Ianthe trembled when she saw him, in pursuance of this idea, unhesitatingly seeking loans at the hands of severe and uncompromising usurers, laying himself under obligations which could only be cancelled by an almost incredible success. This time, however, his sagacity was not at fault, and *the boldness of his undertaking* was justified by the event.

It might have been that years had matured his judgment and given stability to his plans. It might have been that t

wife, wise in counsel and taught by experience, proved an efficient check upon his impetuosity, and that her mild persuasions were more effective in overcoming the opposition he met with from the ignorant peasantry, than all the influence exercised by his own energetic proceedings.

Whichever may have been the prominent cause, or whether it were through the combination of them all, a hitherto unknown success attended him at every step; his prosperity seemed secure. El Fureidis, now become his permanent home, was rescued from poverty and degradation, and its grateful inhabitants acknowledged the silk-manufacturer as their benefactor, protector, and friend.

It was less than a year subsequent to Trefoil's settlement in El Fureidis that the missionary zeal of M. Lapierre led him to the same locality, and the labours of both had been not a little lightened from the circumstance that henceforth civilization and religion had gone hand in hand. The old man and Ianthe were already one in Christ Jesus, and if M. Trefoil himself was less bound by this tie of sympathy, he was a no less willing co-operator with them in every scheme of benevolence. His influence (and it was not small) had more than once warded off the shafts which superstition had aimed at the venerable preacher of a liberal faith. The layman had manfully stood by the pastor when opposition had developed into persecution and threats had ripened into danger, and the friendship which had arisen in times of trial to both had long since been cemented and confirmed by mutual services and association in a common cause.

Thus isolated from the world at large, breasting together the tide of ignorance and prejudice, labouring, the one for earthly rewards, the other for heavenly harvests, but alike promoting human welfare, it was not strange that the individual interests of these two men were merged in the common good, that their differences of character and pursuit were harmoniously blended; that the influence, the wealth, the domestic hearth of the one were at the other's disposal; ?

that the stranger from a distant land was hailed as the welcome guest of both.

A single interview with his new friends sufficed to make Meredith acquainted with much of what has been narrated above; for M. Trefoil made no concealment of anything which concerned himself, and M. Lapierre touched upon such a variety of topics as indicated the nature and extent of his own experiences. The conversation, which had at first been general, became at length limited to the missionary and the Englishman. They talked long together, with mutual and unflagging interest. Then there was a pause. Meredith glanced in the direction of his host, and saw that the pipe had dropped from his mouth, — he had sunk back upon the cushions of his divan, and was lost in a deep slumber.

"Follow his example, my son," said M. Lapierre, rising with a smile, and taking up his stout staff. "You will be refreshed by an hour or two of sleep. No one will come hither to disturb you, for I have a distant excursion to make across the mountains, and all the household, including every servant in yonder western wing, are now, I doubt not, enjoying their siesta."

The old man walked away as he finished speaking, and in obedience to his counsel, Meredith laid himself down and slept, — dreamed that he was in Paradise, and awoke to believe that his dream was true. He was alone in the open saloon, and it was nearly sunset. Long rays of golden light swept across the garden. The fountain was sparkling like topaz in its beams; but the shadows of nightfall obscured the leafy recesses, and the moisture of the evening dew filled the air with that intoxicating sweetness never known but in Lebanon. All was quiet; no one seemed to be stirring within or around the house; and almost awed by the utter stillness, Meredith passed through the enclosure and entered the mulberry grove. He was met by M. Trefoil, returning from an afternoon visit to his factory.

"*You have had a rest proportioned to your morning tramp upon the mountains,*" said the good-humoured host, with the

cheery laugh which gave a winning expression to his face. "Come with me now to the house-top, and tell me if anything can be more glorious than a sunset on Lebanon."

"You may well defy the world to produce a grander or lovelier scene," said Meredith, as, standing beside M. Trefoil on the flat roof, he looked forth upon the prospect. The sun had just reached the tops of the higher range of mountains, which enclosed the glen like an amphitheatre, and their bare limestone crests shone like silver crowns, while their misty slopes reflected a brilliant orange, and the deeper valleys and ravines glowed in a rich robing of purple light. Here and there in the distance gleamed the white villages which dotted the mountain-sides. Far below, in the fruitful plain of the Bekaa, the golden wheat laughed in the western sunlight, and, overtopping El Fureidis itself, the glazed windows and glittering spire of the little church gleamed like "a beacon set upon a hill." Creeping down the steep declivities leading to the valley might be seen long lines of sheep and goats, which the herdsmen were conducting to their folds; peasant-women were singing as they returned homeward with milk-pails on their heads, and the weary husbandmen were toiling up from the plain, each driving before him his panting oxen, which, like their masters, were rejoicing in the day's work done. It was a beautiful scene of rural content and peace, and Meredith and his host stood watching it in silent satisfaction, till the darkness which so quickly succeeds an Eastern twilight came on and wrapped the whole land in shadow.

They then seated themselves near the parapet on which they had been leaning, and the Englishman listened while M. Trefoil descanted on the charms of this Syrian land, and the varied interest which it offered to the traveller.

Meredith interrupted him once, with an involuntary "Hark!" at the same time stretching his head forward to listen, as the sound of a little stringed instrument reached his ear, accompanied by a sweet, musical voice; but the sole response which his emphatic exclamation and movement called forth was a momentary pause, and the careless observ-

tion, "It is only the child singing an evening hymn to her mother;" — after which M. Trefoil continued his discourse, quite unobservant of his auditor's abstraction, which continued as long as the music lasted.

At nine o'clock they were joined by M. Lapierre, who had returned from his pastoral duties; and soon after Havilah brought coffee and biscuits, which she served gracefully with her own hands, and then withdrew. A little later, she once more glided up the staircase, seated herself on a low stool at her father's feet, and stroking the head of her little gazelle, listened attentively to the animated conversation, in which she took no part, her white robes (for her evening dress was always white) glittering in the light of the now risen moon, and her large eyes beaming with vivid intelligence as she turned them upon each speaker in succession. She stayed but a short time, however, then disappeared, speechless and noiseless as she had come, and was seen no more that night.

The little village had been wrapped in slumber several hours when M. Lapierre made a movement to depart. Meredith rose to accompany him, and then learned, with no little surprise, that M. Trefoil had constituted himself his new friend's host, not for a day only, but for the remainder of the young man's stay in El Fureidis; that, without even the ceremony of asking his consent, a room had been allotted him at the villa, his portmanteau and saddle-bags had been transferred thither; and that any hesitation to accept this hospitality would not only cause a serious disappointment, but be viewed, under the circumstances, as a positive breach of etiquette.

M. Lapierre was therefore suffered to depart alone, and although it would have been inconsistent with Meredith's character not to experience a slight shade of annoyance at this impromptu change of quarters, he was consoled by the reflection that M. Lapierre would now be reinstalled in the *humble comforts of which*, for some weeks past, his guest had *involuntarily deprived him*.

CHAPTER VII.

Havilah.

BORN beneath an Indian sun, but with the fresh life of the West glowing in her veins, Havilah was at once the imaginative, impassioned child of the Orient, and the active, intelligent representative of a race as diverse to the Asiatic type as is the point of the sun's rising to that of his going down. Abroad upon the mountains, in the cottages of the peasantry, or in the mission school, she emulated her father in rapidity of thought and nervous energy of will; at home, the meditative repose, the gentle grace, the intense sensibility of the maternal character were reflected in that of the child. In her outer life she was light and free as the bird of the air, but within, the hidden current of her young being possessed a strange, mysterious depth, which none might fathom. In this young nature, existence might be said to be twofold, — the life of reality and the life of thought, the actual and the ideal.

The early surroundings of Havilah's singular lot had not a little favoured this double development of character. In the domain of the village, where M. Trefoil was carrying forward the work of improvement and reform, unwearied activity and systematic labour were the watchwords of success. In the sphere of domestic influence, however, there prevailed that undisturbed quiet, that serene atmosphere, that luxurious sense of repose, which is peculiar to Eastern households, and which Ianthe especially loved.

Thus from childhood Havilah's experience had alternated between scenes of energetic usefulness and hours of unbroken privacy, — the one giving play to all her active powers, the other favouring in a like degree reflection, study, and self-communing. Those, then, who had seen her in gay attire, bounding lightly across the mountain passes, chatting with the village matrons, or playing with the childish throng

that attended on her steps, would scarcely have recognized her fairy form in the pensive figure which half sat, half reclined amid a heap of cushions within a latticed window of her father's villa, and, with her head resting on her hand, gazed abstractedly upon the prospect, or lost herself in the attentive perusal of one among the many books which lay scattered around her.

Not such books are they as those with which a Western belle is wont to beguile an idle hour. Near at hand, and still open, as if reference had lately been made to its pages, is the most precious of all, — a large Greek Bible, bound in heavy vellum, with massive gold clasps and richly illuminated margins; on her lap is a time-worn volume containing the life of one of the early Christian fathers; or, perhaps, a curious old Syriac manuscript holds the prominent place; or, perchance, it is a French scientific work, by aid of which she is learning to classify a newly discovered mineral or flower; or, more probably still, her eager gaze is fixed and her whole mind bent on one of those rare treasures which she dearly loves to ponder, filled with wild Eastern legend and strange Arabic lore, its figurative language and rapt illustration chiming with and warming her own vivid fancies. Whatever may be the theme, she draws from it only elevated thought and pure instruction, if one may judge from the earnest glow of feeling which overspreads her face as she reads, and the aspiration with which she at length lifts her eyes from the book, and communes awhile with her own thoughts.

From such a reverie she is roused by the sudden starting up of the gazelle at her feet, and by the approach of the little handmaiden Geita, who, with a word, a smile, and a motion of her hand towards the outer alcove, whence she has come, at once dispels the train of meditation in which her young mistress is indulging.

It could have been no unwelcome summons which Geita brought, for Ayib, by some quick instinct comprehending its import, speeds away in the direction indicated, in advance of his mistress, and a pleasurable smile succeeds the pensive

expression of Havilah's face as she rises hastily from her cushion, stoops to pick up the heavy golden arrow which has dropped from her hair, binds up with it the long braided bands which hang around her shoulders, then slips her feet into the little silken slippers which stand side by side on the Turcoman carpet, and, having thus adjusted her toilet without the aid of a mirror, hastens to the principal saloon or alcove, which constitutes the reception-room of the family.

In accordance with invariable custom in the East, this saloon, the same in which Meredith had dined a few days before, was enclosed on three sides only, the fourth presenting an open archway, leading directly to the garden. The apartment consisted of an upper and lower platform, the former richly carpeted and encircled by a divan, the latter paved with marble, and embellished with a rippling fountain. A couple of steps served to connect these two divisions of the alcove, and at the moment when Havilah entered, the guest, who had come to crave an audience, stood on the lower stair, pride forbidding him to take his place on the platform reserved for visitors of inferior rank, — modesty excluding him from a position parallel with the daughter of the house. It was Abdoul, a prince in his native desert, but the humble vassal of her to whom he paid an almost worshipping homage.

Most kind and encouraging was her reception of the sheik's son, whom Ayib was already acknowledging by stretching out his graceful head for the youth's caress. "You have come at last, Abdoul," she exclaimed, holding out her hand, over which the Arab boy bowed low, without presuming to touch at. "I feared you had forgotten Havilah."

"When the night-wanderer on the mountains forgets to watch for the morning star, then will Abdoul forget Havilah," was the grave reply, spoken in a tone of mingled sweetness and reproach.

"Then why have you stayed away so long? Ayib and I have sought in vain for the eagle's nest on the mountain, as the white asphodels and blue-eyed campanulas have far

long ago in my mother's china vase. Can Abdoul have learned to feel himself a stranger in the Mother Ianthe's home? Can he doubt that Havilah is his friend?"

"The child of the free air has longed to pursue the mountain birds, and gather the flowers that grow on the topmost crags. He has thought in the lonely night of the orange-trees beside the fountain, and his soul has pined for the touch of the healing hand. Does Havilah remember the day when the vile Turk struck the Arab boy to the ground, and they brought him bleeding hither?" The fire of mingled emotions flashed in the Ismaelite's eye as he thus spoke, and, flinging back the sleeve of his embroidered jacket, he displayed a scar which stretched from his elbow to his wrist, gazed at it a moment, then, changing from a tone of wild excitement to a gentle and subdued utterance, said eloquently, at the same time gazing with grateful tenderness in Havilah's face: "Yes, the wound was deep, and its healing slow, but the arm should be gladly bared once more to the sabre, if the boy might call back the long, sunny days when Ianthe poured balm on his wound, and his heart was comforted, and the rose of Lebanon smiled on him and he felt no pain."

"Those were happy days," said Havilah, "when Ianthe's little daughter found a pleasant playmate in Sheik Zanadeen's son. But he has become a man since then; he rides proudly upon his white mare, and hunts with his good falcon. Ianthe's garden is not broad enough for him now that he has spread his wings, else why comes he not hither?"

"Sheik Zanadeen's son has not been his own master," replied the youth; "he has been in the service of the Frank; and whom Abdoul serves, he serves. He comes now to say farewell. To-morrow he departs for the desert. Will Havilah think when he is far away of him who is unworthy to kiss the soil on which she treads?"

"Havilah will not forget to pray to her God for the playmate of her childhood, when he is guiding the Englishman through distant lands."

"The Englishman remains in El Fureidîs," said the Arab, slowly, and with emphasis, at the same time fixing on Havilah an eye whose keenness scanned every line of her countenance.

Apparently it satisfied him, for the scrutinizing frown passed away from his face when she replied, with apparent indifference to his announcement: "Why, then, hastens Abdoul hence?"

"To pursue the desert winds, to chase the fleet gazelle, to spur the Khâdere across the soft sands which are as cushions to her feet: Abdoul has been absent too long. The old man sits in the door of his tent and longs for his son's embrace. In the morning, he says, 'Inshallah! but he will come to-day;'
'in the evening he sighs, 'Allah! alas, why comes he not?'
The arrow of the desert hears the sigh which comes to him on the night breeze, and he must speed him from the bow."

"May the blessing of Heaven go with you!" said Havilah with feeling. "May you find Sheik Zanadeen and your little brothers well; may your coming bring joy to the old chief's heart; and when his eyes are satisfied with the presence of his son, may some kind errand send you once more to El Fureidîs."

The youth bowed low, touching his head, lips, and heart, in the same expressive and dignified manner that had marked his demeanour more than once during the interview, then answered: "When the husbandman puts his sickle to the yellow corn and the olive-trees drop their ripe fruits into the laps of the maidens, Abdoul will return to guide the Frank into southern lands; meanwhile, Allah protect this house, and send his gentlest breezes to blow on the Mother Ianthe."

"My mother," said Havilah, "would gladly give a parting blessing to him whom she used fondly to call the son of her adoption; but she has been weary, and now she sleeps."

"Say to her," said the boy, with enthusiasm, "that Abdoul loves her image and bears it with him in his heart, — that he hears her voice when the turtle-dove coos to its mate, and feels the soft pressure of her hand on his head when the south wind blows from Araby. For Havilah, Abdoul has brought this casket of sweets, and bids it whisper what he fain would say." As he spoke, he produced from amid the voluminous folds of his silken abayah an exquisite little casket of sandalwood inlaid with pearl, — a masterpiece of Damascene taste and skill, — and, graceful bending on one knee, laid it on the step at her feet.

With mingled hesitation and pleasure, Havilah stooped, lifted the fragrant box, and herself assuming a careless, half-kneeling attitude beside the boy, exclaimed on the beauty of its workmanship; then archly raising its lid, could not resist an almost childish ejaculation of delighted surprise, as she found the contents of the box to consist of layer upon layer of the choicest and most tempting of Eastern sweetmeats.

"All this for Havilah?" she cried. "And has Abdoul brought it through the desert and over the mountains to please the taste which he remembers so well?"

"Were the distance ten times as great, and the casket as heavy as its weight in gold, the way would have seemed short and the burden light to Abdoul," replied the boy, with a gravity unmoved by the playful demeanour of Havilah, who was meanwhile inhaling the mingled perfumes of the casket and its rich fruits, and eagerly offering them to the inspection of Ayib, then laughingly snatching them away, as the little animal, who, like his mistress, was fond of sweets, ventured to intrude his nose too far.

Equally unmoved was the donor of the gift at the sincere and profuse thanks with which Havilah now acknowledged her acceptance of it. Rising from her lowly posture, and *expressing herself with half-girlish, half-womanly grace, as if she dimly realized that the Abdoul of her childhood was scarcely one with the proud son of the desert chief.*

"Thank me not," said Abdoul; "I merit no thanks. I would but make the casket the mouth-piece of that which the soul would say. What perfume is to the smell, and sugar to the lip, may life be always to Havilah. May every evening shed fragrance on the head, and every morning bring sweetness to the heart of the Lebanon rose. Farewell."

She held out her hand with the same cordiality as on first greeting him. He forbore to press it to his lips, though he bowed so low as to sweep it with his soft, curling moustache; then, with a silent, expressive glance upward into her face, he turned, and wrapping his flowing mantle around him, strode quickly away.

Havilah stood for a moment, leaning on the slender railing which ran round the fountain, and watched his retreating figure as he glided through the shrubbery of the garden, then looking down at Ayib — the youth's gift less than a year before — she caressed the little creature, saying fondly, "Do not look so mournful, Ayib. Abdoul is gone, but he will come back at harvest-time." In a moment more she had resumed her place among the cushions, and, with the languor of contentment and repose, had become lost in her book, the casket at her side, and the gazelle, as usual, at her feet.

And while she read, and mused on her reading, her temples fanned by the cool breeze that made its way through the lattice, and her innocent mind at rest, Abdoul mounted his steed, and defying a scorching sun, went out with throbbing heart into the desert.

CHAPTER VIII.

Syrian Hospitality.

Nothing could be more strictly in accordance with the peculiar bent of Meredith's taste and genius than the situation in which he found himself in El Fureidis.

We have seen that in the outset of his Oriental travels he shrank from the ordinary routes and stale experiences of other men. Indeed, it would have been impossible for him, if he would, to pursue the old time-worn routine. It had never been his lot to follow in life's beaten track. It was not in his nature. The sports of his very childhood had either been solitary or diverse from those of his playmates. As a boy, he had scorned the ordinary boyish competitions of strength and skill, to astonish his rivals at an unlooked-for crisis by some strange feat which none other dared attempt. As a student, he had shown no eagerness for the prizes which excited his schoolfellows to toil, relinquishing to his inferiors the outward plaudits and manifest rewards, while he forced for himself a new mine of knowledge, or strained his ardent mind in some erratic pursuit, of which none might see the fruits. And when life held out its dazzling prospects to the man, he suffered others to precede him in the race whose goal he had no wish to win, and either turned to muse amid the by-paths, or, on the wings of a poetic imagination, soared above the crowd, and smiled at the selfish greed with which they strove for the thing he called a bubble.

And so because he disappointed men's hopes, and had no sympathy with their pursuits, they dubbed him odd, — and rightly so.

He had a mind too vigorous and refined, a heart too fresh and sensitive, to permit him to mould his life on the stereotyped plan; but he had not yet learned the noblest use for which that life was given. How, then, could he be otherwise than strange, erratic, and unlike his fellows, — unlike them

in that he failed to share their motives, aspirations, and schemes, — unlike them, inasmuch as having no fixed purposes and aims of his own, he drifted idly on the sea of time, and brought no fruit to perfection?

What he needed was a life motive, and that the highest. But of this need he had not yet become conscious. It was enough for him, if, escaping the satiety and the paltriness of conventional usages, he could find some sufficient spur to his enthusiasm, some temporary impulse to mental and physical activity. And this he found in El Fureidís.

Meredith was too experienced a traveller, too genuine and earnest a man to be satisfied with superficial knowledge, whether of places or people. Still, the restlessness and impetuosity of his character, combined with a certain slowness of adaptation to new circumstances and associates would probably have hurried him through the Holy Land, and left him with prejudiced, if not erroneous views of the country, but for the seeming accident which served to link him to the soil, to furnish a central point round which his future plans might radiate, and to render this little Lebanon valley the nucleus of his Eastern wanderings.

Had the delay in his journey proceeded from other than natural causes, he would have chafed bitterly at such irreparable loss of time; had the hospitality he was now enjoying been importunately thrust upon him, he would have proudly repelled it as an encroachment upon his freedom of thought and action. As it was, his illness and consequent debility had served to habituate him to the interruption of his plans, while the cordial and unaffected kindness of which he had become the subject effectually disarmed his pride, excited the warmest emotions of gratitude, and developed those genial and social qualities of his nature which had seldom before been fully called into exercise.

Immediately upon the re-establishment of his health, it is *true the force of former habit threatened to gain the ascendancy over his newly acquired ingenuousness of heart and manner. Thus it was with something of the precision of*

studied politeness, something of the reserve of aristocratic breeding, that he took an early opportunity to thank M. Trefoil in the warmest terms for his unmerited kindness and hospitality, at the same time expressing the intention to depart at once on his travels.

The sensitive pride which shrank from incurring obligations was not, however, proof against the simple mingling of disappointment and generosity with which this announcement was received by the benevolent manufacturer. Genuine surprise and regret were depicted on every line of his honest countenance. He even uttered a few interjectional phrases, expressive of heart-felt sorrow at the thought of this unexpected parting, and hinted at future schemes of personal pleasure and gratification which it would inevitably frustrate; but with simple disinterestedness he forbore urging them upon his guest, deprecated with childlike simplicity the selfishness of seeking to detain him longer in a place which offered so few attractions to the man of pleasure as El Fureidis, and ended by begging to know if he could be of any use in furnishing horses, engaging guides, or otherwise facilitating the Englishman's journey.

Meredith was staggered in his resolution. He had steeled himself against hospitable solicitations and entreaties, had armed himself with arguments in favour of what he deemed a well-concerted plan of travel; but he was quite unprepared for the evident pain his announcement had caused, as well as for the unsophisticated friendliness and cordiality with which his kind host had kept his own hopes and wishes in the background while he lent himself to the accomplishment of his guest's schemes.

The young man was conscious that decision of purpose had imparted to his manner an air of chilling reserve; he *feared that his abrupt departure might savour of ingratitude, and almost repented the resolution which had been dictated by independence of spirit and a characteristic fear of intrusion, rather than by his own secret preferences.*

It was not without inward satisfaction, therefore, that he listened to the paternal advice of M. Lapierre, who, being appealed to on the subject, gravely put a veto upon Meredith's projected route, pronounced the season unsuitable for extending his travels into Southern Judæa, and earnestly recommended, both in consideration of his health and his advantage as a traveller, that he should devote the remainder of the summer to excursions in the interesting and salubrious regions of the Lebanon and the Anti-Lebanon.

Thus encouraged, M. Trefoil hesitated not warmly to second the proposition; and Meredith, whose mood of mind had been sensibly modified during the conversation, was without difficulty persuaded to make El Fureidis his headquarters for the present, to dismiss Abdoul, who was impatient to join his desert tribe, and to postpone the journey to Jerusalem until after harvest, at which time M. Trefoil confessed that he had proposed to offer himself as his friend's travelling companion to the Holy City.

Meredith still thought proper to protest against the excess of hospitality which now led M. Trefoil to claim him as his guest for an indefinite period. The young man even went so far as to propose an independent residence, and to negotiate with the village sheik, whose dignity was merely nominal, and who for a moderate compensation was ready to evacuate his premises in the Englishman's behalf. But before this purpose could be put in execution, the destined occupant discovered that M. Trefoil, who had reluctantly conceded this point, was resolved none the less to constitute himself his friend's host; that arrangements were going forward for transporting from the villa to the sheik's house all the articles of furniture and domestic luxury that would be required; that well-trained servants were even being drafted from the manufacturer's dwelling to be placed at Meredith's disposal; and, in a word, the latter had the mortification of perceiving that he had thoughtlessly occasioned a degree of trouble and inconvenience which he had never foreseen, and had suffered *the villa to be ransacked and its quiet disturbed in order to*

satisfy his pride and furnish him with a separate establishment.

Thus his final attempt to escape obligation was rendered abortive, and resulted, as might be conjectured, in an explanation, a remonstrance, and the utter demolition of all those barriers which English exclusiveness had opposed to Syrian hospitality. In the hearty shaking of hands and the perfect understanding which ensued a seal was at once set to Meredith's fastidious scruples, he suffered himself to be considered a legitimate member of M. Trefoil's household, and in the perfect liberty he there enjoyed, the utter freedom from conventional restraints, he soon became habituated to his novel and agreeable mode of life, and shaking off the reserve which had elsewhere existed as a veil between him and his fellow-men, suffered his character to appear in its true light.

Nothing could have appealed more strongly to every finer quality of Meredith's nature than the unquestioning and guileless trust which his new friends reposed in him. He had entered this mountain valley as a stranger, and been welcomed as a brother and a friend. He had brought with him no other credentials than those which were expressed in his face and bearing, yet he had been freely admitted to the privacy of a domestic circle. It was well for his simple-hearted and unworldly host that nobleness and generosity were prominent traits in the character of the man with whom he had to deal, for, as will soon be seen, M. Trefoil's confidence in Meredith was unlimited.

"This south-westerly breeze is most refreshing," said the silk-manufacturer, as he rose from his breakfast-table one fine morning during the first week that the Englishman had been his guest. "See," continued he, as he walked to the window and threw wide the lattice; "the air is as pure as crystal. How clearly the mountain-tops are all defined against the blue sky, and how boldly the old convent stands out from its wall of rock. You spoke of a wish to visit the monks," he added, addressing Meredith, who had joined

him at the lattice. "Why not carry out your plan to-day? there can never be a better opportunity."

"I will do so most gladly if you can furnish me with a guide," was Meredith's reply; "there is no spot in the neighbourhood which excites my curiosity so strongly; but my last attempt to reach it was a failure."

"I wish I could accompany you," said the host; "but this is the busiest season of the year among my work-people. The cocoons, as you observed yesterday, will soon be forming; it is a time of labour and anxiety to the villagers, and my overseer and I must be everywhere at once. However, Havilah will be glad of an excuse to visit one of her favourite haunts; she will go with you, I have no doubt, and be a far better guide than her father. The way is rough; but she is a mountain-climber by profession, and I promise you, you can never be introduced to the Superior more favourably than under her auspices. Eh, Havilah?" continued he, laying his hand on the head of his daughter, who was feeding with bread numbers of tiny blue swallows that boldly ate from her outstretched palm. "Is there no fresh ointment prepared for the stiff joints of old Friar Ambrose, no black-letter manuscript to be restored to Father Anastase?"

Havilah answered by putting to flight the little feathered flock, which dispersed for an instant, then confidently reassembled around the handful of crumbs which she had scattered for them on the table-cloth; and hastening from the apartment, she soon returned, bringing with her a quaint, coverless volume, which she laughingly held up before her father.

"I thought so! I thought so!" exclaimed he, as he took it, turned over its leaves, and shook his head despairingly at sight of its unintelligible Arabic characters. "And is this the only one?"

"*The only one,*" responded Havilah, with mock sadness; "*there was another for which I teased poor Father Anastase well, but he persisted in holding up a single fi*
El Fureidia."

ger, and saying, 'One at a time, my daughter, one at a time!'"

"Ah, the old rogue!" cried M. Trefoil. "He did not mean you should be long in coming again;" and carelessly flinging the volume down upon the divan, he took up his red tarboosh, fitted it to his temples, and walked away, saying, "The convent, then, is the order of the day. Good morning, Mr. Meredith; I shall see you again at dinner."

"Take Geita with you, my child," said Ianthe, as Havilah, in simple deference to her father's wishes, was about to leave the room and prepare for her excursion. "Let Bachmet go too, and carry the date brandy which has been ready for a week or more. Do not forget the goat's-milk cheese for Father Ambrose, and as you pass through the village you can leave the herbs for poor Tyiby's sick boy."

Havilah listened dutifully to her mother's instructions, then sped away to fulfil them. A few moments only were required for completing the simple arrangements which were matters of every-day recurrence at the villa, and the morning was yet in its freshness when the little party set out on their pedestrian expedition. They were a picturesque group of excursionists, — the tall, athletic Englishman, in simple shooting-dress of rough gray tweed, his manly Saxon features exposed to full view beneath his visorless Glengarry cap. Havilah, attired in the same convenient costume in which Meredith had first encountered her on the mountains, and the rich glow which the fresh morning breeze imparted to her cheeks well entitling her to the appellation of the "Lebanon Rose," — the little Geita tripping closely beside her mistress, her full trowsers and flowing robe of gaily figured print proclaiming her of Moslem origin, — and Bachmet, clad in the coarse blue stuff of the country, unceremoniously trudging some distance in advance of the other members of the party, *swaying his heavy basket to and fro on his head, and gaily singing as he went.*

They would have struck at once into the mountain paths; at Havilah's commissions among the peasantry must first be

executed, and Bachmet therefore led the way through the village. Here their interruptions and delays were numerous. The master's daughter must pause for a kind word and a blessing from the old miller, whose olive-mill was at rest at the season when the silkworm was most busy, and who, as he sat idly smoking his pipe, literally beneath his own vine and fig-tree, was eager to detain the youthful pride of the village, that he might at the same time bestow a long and curious gaze upon her English companion.

She must not pass the mission school without lingering a moment to distribute among the elder pupils the Arabic Bibles which had recently been procured for them in Beyrout; the younger members of the throng meanwhile crowding round the Englishman, not because his appearance was still unfamiliar to their inquisitive eyes, but because they had not forgotten the handful of paras which he had scattered among them a few days previously.

She must not refuse the pressing entreaties of Tyiby (the good) that she would enter her lowroofed cottage, and cheer with a smile the little fever-parched boy, Meredith being compelled to await his companion without, since Tyiby, though a convert to pure Christianity, could not quite overcome her superstitious dread of the evil eye, and of a stranger's noxious influence upon her countless little servants, which, arranged on wicker frames inside her dwelling, were diligently spinning their silken cocoons.

Meredith chafed somewhat at these successive claims upon his patience; but it was with unruffled good-humour that Havilah acceded to them all; and it was with a smile as fresh as the morning, that, as they turned from Tyiby's cottage at the extremity of the village, she waved her hand to the handsome matron, saying, "Plenty of cocoons to you, Tyiby, and a short day."

"Ah," replied the peasant-woman, following them with a wistful gaze as they turned into the path leading to the foot of the mountain gorge, "labour is the lot of Yoo-soof's helpmees!"

and her shadow will be long in coming;* but sunshine and joy to the Lebanon Rose, and long life to the Frank."

The distance from the village to the convent, though considerably less than that which Meredith had accomplished on his unsuccessful circuit, could not be estimated, even by the shortest route, at less than three or four English miles. The first half of the way consisted of a gradual winding descent to the bed of the mountain stream, and beyond this the opposite cliffs, on which the convent was situated, must be scaled by means of an abrupt, precipitous ascent, which offered a severe test to the unpractised climber.

For an hour or more the path which our party followed was comparatively smooth and feasible, the trees above their heads forming a continued arbour of shade, and the ground beneath their feet flower-strewn at every step. Scarlet anemones, myrtle, and wild roses bloomed in the richest profusion; every rock and crag was enwreathed with blossoming vines, and not only was Meredith's botanical taste gratified to the utmost, but Havilah's superior knowledge was continually appealed to for the recognition of plants to which he could give no name.

Thus the box which Geita carried for the purpose was speedily filled with rare specimens, the senses were well nigh satiated with sweet odours, and the progress of the party was less and less impeded by the temptation to pause or turn aside from the path.

Had Meredith been forewarned that fate had destined him to the free and intimate companionship of the beautiful young creature, the first sight of whom had inspired him only with admiring awe; had it been whispered to him that she whom he had respectfully worshipped in the distance would one day be thrown, as it were, upon his protection and society; in a word, had he had a dim presentiment of his present relations *with Havilah*, his characteristic reserve would have taken

* *The Syrian peasants reckon time by their shadows, and the coming of the shadow signifies nightfall.*

alarm, embarrassment would have absorbed all other emotions, and diffidence and *mauvaise honte* would have rebelled against such a severe ordeal.

But destiny foreshadowed furnishes but a distorted image of the destiny which takes men by surprise, and Meredith in unexpected circumstances proved the very reverse of what those who knew him best might reasonably have prophesied. Self-consciousness, even the self-consciousness of a generous nature, could not exist in the atmosphere of one so artless, so fearless, so free as Havilah. One might as well have been abashed by the wild flowers that reared their graceful heads on every side, or shrunk from the swallows that flitted boldly overhead, or feared to look in the eye of the little gazelle. Havilah was a being of another stamp from those young women into whose society Meredith had hitherto been thrown, and in her presence he became another man.

Thus, in reply to her simple and guileless queries, he talked to her freely of his English home, told her what flowers were native to an English soil, what were the peculiarities of an English climate, and what the most striking points of contrast between her own sunny land and the distant isles of Great Britain. Then led on by the child-like attention and womanly intelligence of his eager listener, he described to her his travels in the farther West, in the land which she cherished and loved as her father's birthplace and the home of his boyhood; told her of the boundless prairies, which had been the red man's hunting-ground, and of streams so broad and long that the boasted rivers of Damascus and of Lebanon, were as feeble rills in comparison.

Nor was the conversation of which this usually reserved man assumed the burden, and with which he effectually beguiled the way, made up alone of his own experience in life or travel. Every trifling incident and object in their walk furnished a *suggestion* to a mind rich in rare attainments, and *refined and poetic culture*, and Havilah's large eyes glowed *with strange interest and surprise*, as, one by one, he un-

locked, at her bidding and for her benefit; those treasures of learning and of taste, hitherto studiously shut from the eye of the world, but of which this child of nature had, by her own simple intuition, found the key.

The quiet of the mountain solitudes, which had only been now and then interrupted by the clear warbling of a bird, was at length broken by the distinct, monotonous sound of rushing water; and as the party drew near the border of the stream which they had been gradually approaching, they recognized the musical plash of one of the foaming cascades that were frequent in the wild ravine where the current in its downward course leaped from crag to crag as joyously as a child at play. Nothing could be more picturesquely beautiful than this little cataract, whose silvery spray rose high in the air, glimmered an instant in the sunshine, then fell laughing back into the stream to continue its race and take its next wild plunge into the valley below.

Meredith and Havilah paused involuntarily to enjoy the refreshing sight and sound; then the former, observing that the torrent at the foot of the waterfall was possessed of considerable depth, and that there were no apparent means of crossing it, looked about him for the material from which to construct a temporary bridge. No branch or log offered itself for the purpose, but an instant's glance revealed a huge stone so placed that his unaided strength could easily hurl it into the bed of the current, and he had placed his hand upon it for this purpose, when, looking up, he saw that he was labouring for his own benefit alone. Havilah had already crossed the flood by means of some little points of rock scarcely discernible amid the spray, and on which her foot had been planted so lightly that she now stood dry-shod upon the opposite margin, watching the motions of Meredith, as also those of Geita and Bachmet, who had removed their shoes, *and were deliberately fording the stream somewhat lower down. It only remained for Meredith to follow the example of Havilah, which he did unhesitatingly, though not escaping*

a wet foot and a slight shade of mortification at the advantage she had gained over him.

Nor was this advantage in any degree lost by his young guide during the rough and tortuous ascent which commenced the moment the stream was crossed. Meredith might scale precipices and surmount rude flint-strewn staircases in the rock with a rapidity and energy which astonished himself, but he could never be in advance of his fairy-footed companion, nor gain a point where his gallantry could be of any service to her. If he lost sight of her for a moment, and looked back suspecting she had paused to take breath, he would hear her voice above him, and glancing upward would behold her standing on some apparently inaccessible crag, smiling at his bewilderment. If he sought to warn her against a sliding stone or insidious pitfall, she would have safely passed the dangerous crisis before the word could escape his lip, and so far from attempting to offer his aid, it soon became the Englishman's sole effort to at least equal her in boldness and agility.

Thus vying with each other in that mountain exercise, which to the healthy and the young has always in it something inspiring, they soon gained the lofty and desolate eminence on which the convent stood, having left far behind them the weary Geita, and Bachmet panting beneath his load.

CHAPTER IX.

The Maronite Convent.

IF the original founder of this old fortress-like monastery was actuated by the desire of rigid seclusion from the world, or by a love of lonely and sublime contemplation, he could not have chosen a more fit locality. It seemed, indeed, a marvel that the necessities of life could be obtained, and its ordinary routine carried on amid such desolation of surrounding nature, and of late years this result had only been accomplished by the most untiring industry. The institution had once been largely endowed, and the monks had enjoyed extensive revenues, but the political convulsions and rival feuds which had from time to time shaken and devastated the mountains, had swept away the property and influence of the once powerful brotherhood, which had now dwindled to a few feeble old men, who by diligent labour and patient economy eked out a scanty livelihood.

But though the ambitious and proselyting spirit of their order had died out with its wealth, the pure and simple virtues of monastic life had never been so fully developed as in this its day of outward decline. Their labours as husbandmen, vine-dressers, and gardeners, left the good fathers no time for contentions and intrigues; and a more harmless, peaceable, and hospitable household could scarcely be conceived than this band of Maronite brethren, who, so long as they were undisturbed in the remnant of their heritage, had no disposition to interfere with the rights and privileges of other men.

Between the inmates of the convent and the family of M. Trefoil there had always existed a friendly and neighbourly understanding, which was evidenced rather by a reciprocity of civilities and kind deeds than by any frequency of intercourse. The old Superior had observed with a somewhat jealous eye the successful labours of M. Lapierre, and had

shaken his head disapprovingly as he watched the erections within the constant range of his vision, of a church dedicated to a liberal faith, but he had forborne any open or secret expostulation, and the bells of the convent tower and the village church had long since learned to chime in unison.

In the early years of Ianthé's residence in El Fureidís, it had been her habit to pay an annual visit to the convent, carrying with her not a few acceptable gifts to the old men, and especially exciting their gratitude by her thoughtfulness for their increasing infirmities, and by the invaluable prescriptions and remedies in which she was wonderfully skilled.

But the strongest bond of union between the convent fathers and the inhabitants of the opposite valley, was the mountain child, who, as the companion of her mother, had early been admitted to the free range of court-yard, garden, and refectory, and who, now that Ianthé's incapacity for fatigue forbade her periodical visits, had become at once the joy of the old monks' hearts, and their chief medium of intercourse with the outer world. Hers was the only youthful laugh that ever interrupted the grim silence of their ruinous corridors; she alone loved to ransack the antique library on which they prided themselves, as the chief relic of their former grandeur; the choicest fruits of their orchards, the rarest flowers of their gardens, were reserved for her approbation and praise; and humble as their offerings might be, the messenger of Ianthé's bounty seldom went away empty-handed.

M. Trefoil had spoken truly when he said that no stranger could be introduced into the convent under more flattering circumstances than as the friend of Havilah. There was welcome in the quick striking of the old porter's crutch upon the pavement, as he came hobbling to unbar the gateway to her familiar tap; there was cordiality in the eagerness with which he fumbled at the rusty lock; there was untold hospitality in the generous manner in which he threw wide the ports

pronounced with trembling lips a blessing on the child, and held out a paralytic hand to her companion.

"This sunny day has brought us up the mountain, you see, Father Ambrose," said Havilah.

"It is always a sunny day when you come hither," said the old monk, as he closed and rebarred the door, "always," he continued to mutter to himself as, tottering on his crutch, he preceded his visitors through the narrow courtyard, now and then looking back over his shoulder to feast his eyes upon Havilah, and assure himself that she and the stranger were following close upon his footsteps.

The outer court-yard which they thus crossed was a high-walled enclosure, a mere vestibule leading to the inner or principal square, round which the convent buildings were situated. The chuckling satisfaction which Father Ambrose had evinced at sight of Havilah was succeeded by an almost ludicrous air of dignity and parade on the part of the imbecile old man, as, holding back the inner gate, he stood aside to let his visitors pass, his dim eye scanning Meredith's face, that he might read where were the impressions of awe which he believed it impossible this interior view could fail to awaken. Poor Father Ambrose! he remembered the days of pride when he had held open this same gateway for the admission of some neighbouring dignitary, followed by a long ecclesiastical train, and met at the entrance by the convent superior at the head of an imposing priestly procession, while the tower-bell rang out a welcome, and the central fountain sent up its sparkling waters, and busy functionaries hastened to and from the luxurious refectory. He forgot that these days of grandeur had long since passed, that one after another the stately procession had been laid in the rock-hewn sepulchre below, that the tower bell had ceased to sound his welcome to an illustrious throng, that the fountain was dried up, *the orange and fig trees that stood around it withered, and that nothing was left to indicate past greatness but a platform of defaced, uneven paving, a half-ruined chap*

hewn from the rock, a long line of vacant dormitories, and a few old men tottering on the verge of the grave.

There is a certain melancholy grandeur attendant on utter ruin and decay; but even this element of tender interest was wanting to the scene which the old priest disclosed, with such a mockery of pride, to the gaze of Meredith. The wide, open area, so far from reposing in stately desolation, had been converted to the homeliest domestic uses, and was suggestive rather of the present laborious economy and patient thrift from the fraternity than of the solemn receptions and dignified ceremonies of the past. In one corner, a gray-bearded priest, clad in the coarse blue robe worn by the Syrian peasantry, was diligently shaking a huge skin filled with cream, which he was in the act of converting to butter; two others were transferring wine of their own manufacture from one receptacle to another, several clumsy casks being mounted for the purpose on the discoloured stones of the dry fountain; a fourth was engaged in the primitive occupation of grinding corn between two flat stones; while various implements of toil, resting against the walls, indicated the numerous other uses to which the court-yard was applied.

All labour, however, was suspended on the entrance of Havilah and the Englishman. There was a mingling of curiosity and shyness in the manner with which the simple brethren eyed the latter; but sincere and unaffected pleasure shone in each of their faces as the young girl passed from one to another, with here a kind inquiry and there a congratulatory comment on their health or the success of their labours.

Their Superior, they said, was at work in the flower-garden, and thither Father Ambrose hurried his guests, after affording them a brief opportunity to take a general survey of the establishment, so far as it could be discerned from the court-yard. A small archway and a narrow corridor, which pierced like a tunnel to the exterior wall of the monastery, conducted to a small plat of ground, which was the chief source of recreation to the convent inmates, and which well rewarded their patience and skill. Every particle of ear

had been laboriously transported hither, and was artificially retained and watered; still the garden sufficed for the production and growth of every mountain herb and flower which could enrich and beautify the place. Here, in the midst of his floral treasures, the Superior might often be seen, labouring with as true a zeal as that of the plodding husbandmen, who with their single yoke of oxen were diligently tilling the olive-orchards and grain-fields below. As Havilah and Meredith approached, he stood, leaning on his spade, looking forth on the broad lands of the distant plain, which had once been the property of his predecessors, and, wrapped in his black gown and capuchin-like hood, resembled rather a statue of porphyry than a living being. On hearing the sound of footsteps, he turned quickly round; revealing an attenuated face and figure, and a grave, melancholy expression of countenance. A cordial though sickly and evidently unwonted smile played over his pale features, as he bestowed a paternal benediction on Havilah, and greeted Meredith with friendly hospitality, though with scarcely more enthusiasm than had been evinced by the other friars. He warmed into animation, however, as Havilah inquired after each of his vegetable favourites, commented on the growth of each rare shrub, and finally exclaimed with delight, as she caught sight of a rose which had been the object of his care and contemplation for months, "It has blossomed at last! Oh, how beautiful!"

"It is yours, my daughter," was the eager response; and stooping down, the devoted gardener removed it reverentially from its stalk and placed it in Havilah's hand with the air of one who is laying a sacrifice on an altar, adding as he did so, "It is the first fruits of my labours, dedicated to the Mother Ianthe." Then turning to Meredith, he addressed him in Italian, a language with which the Englishman was fortunately acquainted, and leading the way back to the convent, *proposed to conduct him through the buildings, urging him at the same time, if he purposed remaining in the country to take up his abode within its walls.*

THE MARONITE CONVENT.

Though the latter part of the proposition was respectfully declined, the former was accepted with alacrity. Father Ambrose, with due deference, retired to his bench in the court-yard, and Meredith made a survey of the ancient building under the guidance of the Superior, — and under his guidance alone, it may be added, for Havilah had disappeared at the same moment with Father Ambrose, though in a different direction. Had Meredith been less familiar with the impulsive and independent movements of the young girl, he would have felt some anxiety for her safety among the lonely corridors and dim archways of the half-dilapidated convent; and it must be confessed that, even with his knowledge of her self-reliant habits, he was somewhat relieved when, having passed through the chapel, refectory, and dormitory, explored subterranean vaults, and surveyed the prospect from the high tower, he was at length ushered into the antique library, and beheld her quietly seated on the low sill of a deep-set Gothic window, the floor around her strewn with strange old books and manuscripts, while Father Anastase was seeking amid his musty archives for some hidden volume which he had reason to believe would suit her erratic tastes.

She looked up as Meredith and the Superior entered, responded slightly to the former's smile of surprise and recognition, but without suffering herself to be interrupted by their presence, continued her eager examination of the books by which she was surrounded, selected that which she most coveted, then, gathering up the remainder, assisted Father Anastase in restoring them to their proper places, a service with which the old librarian could ill dispense, since his ignorance was such that he could not even read the titles of the volumes whose exterior it was his pride to have handled all his life long.

Meredith was in the mean time listening with what patience he might to the somewhat tedious narration of the Superior, who had an almost interminable story to tell of the past greatness of the establishment, its privileges, and

dowments. Her labours finished, Havilah drew within hearing, and bestowed for a while the most docile and respectful attention upon the old man's words, though she could not now and then avoid an incredulous smile at some of the absurd legends in which the simple monks placed the most implicit faith. At length, bethinking herself of the lateness of the hour, she took advantage of a pause in the convent history, and with a graceful apology to the Superior, urged the necessity for departure. Meredith at once acceded to the proposition; they declined with united voice a cordial offer of refreshment, on the plea that dinner, which had been delayed on their account, would be awaiting them at the villa, and the whole party now hastened to the court-yard. It was near the hour for the refectory bell to sound, and the monks, thirteen in number, had all assembled round Geita and Bachmet, each eager to express thanks for his share in Ianthe's bounty, and to send back some slight token of gratitude, in the shape of ripe fruit, mammoth vegetables, or a bunch of rare herbs.

It was interesting to watch Havilah moving amid the little group, the cheerfulness of her pleasant parting words reflected in each shrunken face, and her gay garments contrasting with their time-worn habiliments like the tints of some bright bird flitting among the dry twigs and withered leaves of autumn. From Meredith the simple friars kept a little aloof, his reserved bearing evidently impressing them with a sense of restraint which was not observable in their Superior, who with grave decorum accompanied his guests to the inner portal, where he bade them farewell. He manifested a slight shade of embarrassment as Meredith with some hesitation placed in his hand a generous gratuity. His fingers closed eagerly over it, however, nor could he resist a quick glance at the glittering gold, which his humbler brethren were gazing at with undisguised satisfaction.

Nor was old Ambrose forgotten; he, too, received the recompense of his services, and it was not without reason that as he barred the gateway behind the visitors he prayed the good Virgin might soon send them thither again.

This visit to the convent, in spite of the tedious narrative of the old Superior, had but served to increase Meredith's interest in the place and its isolated inmates, an interest which was still further heightened by the graphic sketches which Havilah gave him on their homeward way of the remarkable ruins and archæological curiosities with which the mountain abounded, and to which the old friars could readily guide him. "They believe them," said she, "the remains of temples erected in the time of the Crusaders, and they will relate to you many a marvellous legend of miracles performed at the sacred shrines; but Father Lapierre, who is as learned as the monks are ignorant, ascribes these ruins to an earlier age, and thinks them the remains of temples erected in the high places by the ancient Hivites for the worship of Baal."

Perhaps this information, with various other hints equally suggestive to the antiquary and man of science, could not have been better timed, for so thoroughly was the spirit of exploration aroused in Meredith, that he fully resolved to come hither again at the earliest opportunity; and, animated by this resolve, was steeled against the difficulties of the mountain descent, which was even more perilous than the ascent had been. Under the influence of Havilah's example, however, he was becoming an adept in pedestrian exploits, and they soon found themselves at the foot of the declivity, where they crossed the water-course in the same manner as in the morning.

They had scarcely gained the other side, and struck once more into the flowery path, when they were joined by M. Lapierre, who, hearing of their excursion, and the probable hour of their return, had come to meet them. Meredith, eager to learn more of the Canaanitish ruins, turned the conversation in that direction, and Father Lapierre, equally ready for antiquarian disquisition and argument, entered upon a discourse replete with interest to both his listeners, and which *fully engrossed their time and attention during their homeward walk to the villa.*

CHAPTER X.

Vesper Bells.

THIS visit to the convent was but one among many similar excursions which Meredith made in the companionship of Havilah, though seldom in the exclusive enjoyment of her society. Whether Father Lapierre's superior acquaintance with the world had taught him a degree of caution unknown to M. Trefoil, or whether the former simply followed the leading of his own inclinations, it henceforth rarely proved the case that a mountain expedition was undertaken which did not include the good missionary in the party. His distant, parochial labours, however, afforded him a sufficient pretext for frequently proposing to accompany his young friends, and aid Havilah in the duties delegated to her by her father, and it may be doubted whether the old man's true motive was ever suspected either by Meredith or his guide, both of whom appeared to find equal delight in the rich and varied resources with which M. Lapierre contributed to their edification and enjoyment.

Had Meredith sought to evade this venerable guardianship, nothing would have been easier than for him to intrude himself upon Havilah's solitary hours, for he was familiar with her daily avocations, knew all her accustomed haunts, and the precise moment when she might be encountered at the peasant's cottages, the mission school, or at Ayn el Bered, where she went regularly to procure her mother's noonday beverage. But even if he had been capable of thus taking advantage of the confidence reposed in him, nothing was further from his thoughts than attempting to play the gallant towards the young girl, who neither sought nor avoided his society, but treated him with the simple, unaffected cordiality which she might have bestowed on a respected kinsman, long admitted to the privileges of the household.

Had Meredith's early impressions of Havilah continued in full force, had he departed on his travels with only the vague,

mystical sense of beauty which dawned upon him in the chapel on the first night of his arrival, and was confirmed by the vision that haunted him in his illness, it is probable that she would have been treasured in his memory as a dim unreality, the angelic but shadowy creation of his fancy. But this poetic dream could not exist in the daylight of his nearer intercourse with her. He had been startled from it when she burst upon him in the character of a mountain wood-nymph, he forgot it altogether as he beheld her amid the endearing relations of her home.

But although the fictitious emotions of an imaginative mind had been thus suddenly dissipated, they were superseded by sentiments none the less engrossing. The picturesque beauty of Havilah's face and figure, the artless and attractive graces of her manner, so far from being dimmed by familiarity gained new power with every variation of her features, every circumstance which called her sensibilities into play; and the Englishman who, in the isolated enjoyment of his favourite pursuits had hitherto seemed blind and deaf to female fascinations, became lost in admiration and curiosity. Not that admiration which seeks to appropriate what is fair, but that artistic and zealous enthusiasm which he would have bestowed upon any other lovely object in nature, not that rude curiosity which avails itself of every opportunity to pry into the sacred recesses of life and character, for he would not for worlds have invaded her independent range of thought and action, but rather that intense and absorbing interest which made her every word a problem, her every motion a study.

This deep and, to Meredith himself, half-conscious influence would never have strengthened into a motive power, — it might even have sunk into indifference or been pallied by satiety, — had Havilah been nothing more than the light-hearted mountain girl, the idol of her parents, the pride of the highland valley. The man of large culture and fastidious tastes would soon have wearied of her fair features if they had never been illumined by intelligence, would have smiled with ill-disguised contempt at her simplicity if it had been but.

other name for ignorance, and would have been disgusted with her unfailing good-humour if it had ever degenerated into insipidity.

But Havilah, heir as she was of many and varied gifts, had been trained in a school which eminently fitted her for the companionship of an intellectual and cultivated man. From infancy she had been the cherished pupil of M. Lapierre, and the mind in which he had early awakened the thirst for knowledge had drunk freely from the ever-open fountain of his ripened wisdom and experience. The accomplishments which to many cost years of labour had been hers by circumstance or intuition. Music had come to her as an inspiration, and most of the modern languages had been familiar to her ears from childhood. Thus she had been spared much of the usual toilsome routine, and had found time for the severer pursuits into which it had been M. Lapierre's delight to initiate her, even at a tender age. Nor had books been the only or the chief means of her instruction. Hand in hand with the old man, she had trod the mountain paths, each tree, each stone, each flower furnishing the lesson in natural science, each castellated ruin or deserted shrine the open volume in which she read the history of a mighty past. But better far than all her acquirements was the sweet docility with which she ever bent her mind to new attainments. Labour as she might, she could never probe the depths of her master's learning; and as the pious man had not forgotten to impress her with the truth that his own stores of knowledge were but as a drop in the sea of the great unknown, she had been saved alike from pedantry and presumption, and, ignorant of the comparative progress she had made, maintained invariably the mental attitude of a child.

It was this, perhaps, more than any other trait, which captivated her father's English guest. Astonished he might *well be, when accident* revealed her familiarity with abstruse *science, when, in the capacity of his Lebanon guide, she readily deciphered* some old Saracenic inscription, or defined *the intricate shades of ancient architecture; but the moment*

when her winning graces stole into his heart were those in which, having strayed beyond the boundaries of her own sphere of learning, she plied him with some earnest question, or fixed her large eyes gravely on his face while he discoursed on some foreign land or original theme. Nor is this strange, for man loves a reverential spirit in woman, and the Englishman was by nature proud.

Meredith's genius was of the reflective order; but never had he meditated with such ardour as upon the subject which now engrossed him. He had been a student all his life, but he had never been so enamoured of study; he had philosophized upon men and things, but never had he so flattered himself that he saw and interpreted aright, as while he watched the unfolding of Havilah's youthful charms, and read a new treatise upon humanity on the fair and open page of the young girl's character.

But there were moments when, despite all the progress he had made, he felt himself suddenly baffled; moments when the sympathetic chain seemed broken, and he could no longer comprehend the emotions veiled beneath Havilah's countenance. A look, a word, was sometimes enough to call up that expression, so strangely sweet, so deeply incomprehensible, which had awed him when he first beheld her in the village church, but which now, as then, he failed to trace to its mysterious source. It was no searching glance, no pensive melancholy, which thus stole over the face, rested there a moment, then vanished gradually away, or melted into a smile; it was but the reflection of an inward communing, a look such as infants sometimes wear when mothers say, "Hush! the angels whisper to them." Let it come when or how it would, however, let it overspread the face for a moment only, or linger upon it for hours, it never failed to check the young man's presumptuous faith in his own penetration, to throw him back to the earliest point in his acquaintance with Havilah, and impress him with the conviction that, after all, he understood scarce anything of her inner nature.

He little knew that while he lent himself to the engross-

study of her heart and life, daily becoming more familiar with every external gift and grace, and arrested only on the verge of the spiritual realm, she, through the power of her own simplicity, was reading and comprehending him as no mortal had ever done before, that with the clearness of an unsophisticated mind she was weighing him in the balance, and that by the intuition of her own pure spirit she had probed the depths of his unsatisfied soul, and had beheld the void within.

We have said that there was nothing clandestine in the conduct or views of Meredith. Still less did it occur to his simple-minded entertainers to attribute to him any other interest in their household than that of a friendly guest; and looking upon him merely in the light of an intelligent and earnest traveller, they sought, not to engross his society, but to facilitate his acquaintance with the beauties, the antiquities, and the natural resources of their Syrian home.

Had he been wanting in the enthusiasm requisite to the Oriental traveller, he could not have failed to find inspiration in El Fureidis. Both M. Trefoil and M. Lapierre had implicit faith in Syria, — the one in its internal capabilities, its striking position among nations, its industrial facilities, and its future destiny as the depôt and mart of Eastern and Western commerce; the other, in its soul-stirring memories, its incomparable beauties, its historical and scientific records, its ever-living verdict in confirmation of recorded truth.

True enthusiasm seldom fails to make converts; and both these ardent men found in Meredith a ready disciple to their creed. Each vied with the other in exciting his interest and riveting his attention, and each in turn had the satisfaction of awakening his sympathetic zeal, and seeing with what unflagging devotion he engaged in their favourite explorations and researches.

Many, therefore, were the schemes that were formed, the *excursions that were mapped out for the benefit of our traveller, and the promotion of the objects which he cherished in common with his new friends.* Some of these expedition

led to places of interest in the neighbourhood, and occupied but a single day; others were of greater magnitude, giving rise to extensive preparation, and not infrequently involving exciting incident and adventure. In the former case, M. Lapierre and Havilah were usually Meredith's companions; in the latter, he was accompanied only by hired guides, or, as business cares became less pressing, by M. Trefoil, who on one occasion joined him on an interesting circuit among the mountains, including a visit to some of the cities of the seacoast, and occupying no less than a week.

But it must be confessed, that while fully appreciating the information gained in these more extended tours, the most grateful feature attending them, in Meredith's estimation, was the cordial welcome home; and that he gave his unhesitating preference to those shorter and less pretentious journeys, when, accompanied by the hoary old man and the light-footed maiden, he spent the day among the Barûk mountains, and returned at night to the sweet seclusion of the villa.

It was on these occasions that he realized most fully the pleasures of congenial intercourse, and gained a closer knowledge of Havilah's peculiar graces of intellect and heart; for, though Father Lapierre's was ever the leading mind, the old man wisely forebore to exercise any restraint upon his cherished pupil, but, satisfied with the protection his presence afforded, left to her all the minor duties of hostess and guide, for which she was admirably fitted. It was on these occasions, too, that, unconsciously to himself, the characteristic bias of Meredith's mind was not infrequently exhibited, though in those delicate lines of light and shade perceptible only to a pure and exalted sensibility.

This unique, but as it were organized trio of pedestrians, were returning one evening from a pilgrimage to the little village of Barûk, on the opposite side of the mountain to that on which *El Fureidis* is situated. It was near the hour of sunset, and as they approached the topmost verge of the mountain, Meredith and Havilah instinctively quickens

their footsteps, that they might enjoy the magnificent prospect which the elevation afforded while yet clothed in the gorgeous western light. The path, as usual, was precipitous, and Father Lapierre, who though an equally skilful, was a far less agile climber, continued somewhat in the rear, and proceeding with firm but measured step, was still at the foot of the final acclivity when his companions gained the summit.

Meredith had stood with entranced vision upon many of the glorious heights of Lebanon, but never had the circumstance and the hour combined to impart such sublimity to the scene. Far as the eye could reach in every direction, it commanded a panorama of mingled beauty and grandeur, from the yellow corn-fields and dusky olive-groves of the Eastern plain, to the clear blue waters of the Mediterranean, which terminated the western view. Here stretched a long mountain line, the fertile sides of the nearer hills clothed with terraced groves and vineyards, and embosoming white villages in their sheltered nooks. Yonder might be seen distant and more rugged crags, bristling with precipices of tawny rock, seamed with dark-brown veins, and clothed at intervals with the heavy foliage of the fir and pine. Towering above all, the hoary Hermon reared its lofty crest, capped with snow which glistened like silver in the light of the setting sun. Far away against the horizon might be dimly discerned the graceful outline of lesser ridges, which, veiled in misty blue, seemed to melt into the very ether, and along the shore of the placid sea might be traced the undulating curves of the sandy coast, with the white walls and towers of Beyrout standing boldly out against their dark background of orchards, gardens, and groves. If anything could have served to add dignity to such a scene, it was furnished by the solemn memorials of the past which were scattered at the very feet of the beholders. On the mountain summit, thrown together in wildest confusion, either by an earthquake or the hand of some human destroyer, lay the ruined remains of an ancient temple, such as are frequent in these regions, and which, although their precise

origin and use are unknown to the traveller, are in themselves impressive chroniclers of a once powerful race and age; the lofty porticoes, the broken pilasters, and huge bevelled blocks of stone, telling of the majestic hand which had reared them, a hand only less mighty than that which had hurled them down.

Seated on a fallen column, impressed by the sublimity of the scene, and scarcely less so perhaps by its perfect repose, Meredith and Havilah gazed upon the prospect for a while in a silence which was at length broken by the former. "No wonder," exclaimed he, "that the old poets of Syria were inspired by such visions of nature as they were permitted to enjoy! No wonder that their imagery is unequalled in beauty and grandeur, since it was drawn from such a source!" And with the eloquent tongue of one whose artistic and poetical enthusiasm is aroused, he repeated, not without fine effect, some of those many passages of the ancient prophet's description of the greatness and glory of Lebanon.

Havilah listened with pleasure to the recital, half wondering meanwhile at Meredith's familiarity with scripture. He had scarcely finished when the venerable head of Father Lapiere appeared above the bare rocks which lined the mountain pass, the hood of his black cloak having fallen back, permitting the light evening breeze to sway his hoary locks while his noble countenance was lit by an expression of beatific joy. The sun sank to the verge of the horizon at the very moment when the old man planted his foot on a heavy pediment of rock just above the fallen column on which his companions were seated, and at the same instant the vesper bells of the neighbouring village sounded a musical stroke, which was echoed from cliff to cliff, — was answered by more distant peals from the various convents among the mountains, and all in turn were caught up and re-echoed through height and valley until the air rang with the sacred chime.

As the monitory sounds died away upon the air, the majestic old man, whose figure seemed to expand in the gloomy light, pointed with one hand towards the expiring rays of the

sun, which were gilding earth and sea; then stretching the other towards the slender crescent just discernible in the top-most ether, broke forth with grave emphasis in the words of the psalmist: "He appointeth the moon for seasons; the sun knoweth his going down. He looketh on the earth, and it trembleth. He toucheth the hills, and they smoke. Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening. O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches. The glory of the Lord shall endure for ever. I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live. My meditation of him shall be sweet. I will be glad in the Lord."

The sacred harpist of Israel himself could scarcely have looked more sweetly sanctified than did the holy man who thus gave vent to his feelings in worship. Havilah had been impressed by the appropriateness of Meredith's scriptural allusions; but a deeper sympathetic chord was struck as the saintly priest rose above the worship of nature, and poured out his soul in gladness to the Lord. She rose from her seat beside Meredith, gently drew near to the old man, locked her arm within his, and while the Englishman coolly took out his drawing materials and commenced a sketch, she followed the serene flight of her soul's best friend, and soaring beyond the confines of this mortal realm, both spirits felt themselves for a while transported into the nearer presence before the throne of God.

When Meredith looked up from the complicated outlines of his unfinished drawing, that look was on Havilah's face which he had vainly tried to understand. With her wonted courtesy she approached and examined his sketch, but her thoughts had been ranging beyond the sphere which can be measured by angles and lines, and she could not at once bring herself to the comprehension of those rules of art with which her English friend had lately sought to acquaint her.

When, therefore, M. Lapierre, who remembered the difficulties of the return path to the villa, suggested that they should commence the descent before the shades of night

overtook them, Meredith closed with alacrity the book whose fly-leaf had served him for a tablet, and with a mind singularly out of tune, accompanied his friends down the mountain, oppressed with the undefined consciousness that the old man and the young girl were in the enjoyment of a communion of spirit from which he was ungenerously excluded.

The book which had furnished Meredith with drawing paper, and which was seldom absent from him in his rambles, was the same sacred volume which had suggested to him words of beauty, and had dictated to Father Lapierre a hymn of praise. This English pocket-bible, which served our traveller as text-book, manual, and guide in his journeyings and explorations through Palestine, bore many a mark of the frequency with which it was called into requisition. Its margins were crowded with annotations and references, numerous leaves were turned down at the corners, or had slips of paper inserted between them, and in its general appearance it resembled not a little the note book of a man of business.

It was produced for consultation on all occasions, and was the arbiter in all doubtful questions of Hebrew literature, Syrian route, and antiquarian research. In the long evening conversations on the house-top, when Havilah, seated on the upper stair, with her head resting against her father's knee, listened to the discussion of excursions that were past, or the arrangements for future travels — the unquestioned facts of scripture were the invariable records with which experiences were compared, expectations adduced, and of nothing could Meredith be more unjustly accused than of indifference to the authority which in this view he found invaluable. To Havilah's clear perceptions, however, nothing so fully "held the mirror up to this man's nature" as his estimation of the volume to her so precious. It taught him the way — but not the only way; the truth — but not the highest truth, for he had yet to learn that he bore with him in his wanderings the spirit's compass and the soul's great guide.

CHAPTER XI.

Involuntary Proposal.

THE summer had passed. The silkworms had spun their cocoons, and perished. The harvests of corn and wheat had been beaten out on the clay threshing-floors, and gathered into the garner. The olive-trees had been shaken, the ripe fruit heaped into the laps of the laughing maidens, and the portion that still clung to the boughs left for the wayfarer and the gleaner. The grapes had ripened on the vine in clusters as rich and heavy as those which the ancient Hebrews brought from Eshcol to the prophet when they went to spy out the wealth of the land. The noise of the vintage shouting had gone up as the men and boys trod out the rich wine in the wine-presses. The time of labour was over, and the short season of rest had come to the husbandman. Abdoul, according to promise, had returned from the desert. The noble steeds of pure Arab breed, which the sheik's son had purchased for the Frank from the best that his tribe could boast, chafed within the boundaries of their stalls, snuffed the air with their nostrils, pawed the ground, and panted with impatience at their new master's long delay. And still the Englishman lingered in El Fureidis.

It was now the month of October, the annual period, not of rest only, but of festivity to the peasant of the Lebanon, and the village of El Fureidis was rife with mirth and gaiety in honour of the nuptials of Asaad and Hendia. Asaad, the native overseer in the factory of M. Trefoil — Hendia, the comely daughter of Tyiby (the good).

It was a universal holiday; the factory bells were ringing, not with the monotonous sound which was wont to summon the artisans to their work, but with the gleeful notes of jubilee. *The village matrons, clothed in their best, and proudly bearing on their heads the heavy tantours — tokens of their own matrimonial dignity, were wending their way to the cottage of*

Yooseof, each bearing some trifling gift to the bride. The young men, with rude instruments of music in their hands, were already forming the procession which was to serve as an escort to the bridegroom. The master's daughter, without whose presence the ceremony would scarcely have been deemed complete, was dressed in gala attire, and followed by her bounding gazelle, was now roaming through Ianthe's garden, gathering flowers with which to weave with her own hands the bridal chaplets, while the master himself, standing on his housetop, gazed with satisfaction on the groups of gay and prosperous villagers, then turned to address a remark to Meredith, who stood beside him.

"It does my heart good," said the benevolent manufacturer, "to see my people so happy. I call them mine, and I assure you I feel like a father to them all. This village was one of the least thriving of the neighbourhood when I settled here, Mr. Meredith. The siroccos had for several years in succession injured the crops, the terraces had fallen into decay, conscription and taxes had depopulated and impoverished the place, rival feuds between the Druses and Maronites had effected still worse results. But you see what we have accomplished. I do not speak boastfully. It is the same wherever among the mountains European arts and civilization have been introduced; or if this is more fortunate than other villages, it is due chiefly to Father Lapierre's influence, not to mine."

"You have every reason to be proud, the proudest man I know," exclaimed Meredith, energetically responding to M. Trefoil's general remarks, but with a gaze fixed upon his daughter, whose figure was discernible from the spot where the two stood.

"Oh no, not proud," was the prompt and sincere reply, "only grateful. But, my friend, I am not satisfied yet. Thanks to your liberal aid, I mean to do far more for myself, my work-people, and the example of our neighbours. This introduction of steam into my factory is to be of essential service. Our supply of water is ample, but irregular, very irregular. Th-

new agent is to be depended upon; it will accomplish wonders;" and while Meredith listened in a half-absent way, his host proceeded to dilate with the same earnestness as on previous occasions upon the advantages of the new and long-desired experiment, which through his guest's prompt and generous advancement of the necessary capital the manufacturer had been recently enabled to make.

It had been a slight satisfaction to Meredith to accidentally discover a method by which he could defray some portion of his obligation to M. Trefoil, whose expenditure had so kept pace with his success that it had never hitherto been in his power to make the projected improvement in his machinery. As, however, the wealthy Englishman's order upon his banker for the necessary amount had been received by the sanguine manufacturer in the same careless, unhesitating spirit in which it was offered, it had been a matter of scarcely any amount to Meredith, who would have soon ceased to remember both the loan and its object had they not been subjects of such engrossing interest to the adventurous and eager man of business.

It was with but feigned interest, therefore, that Meredith listened to M. Trefoil's speculative schemes, until his attention was irresistibly arrested by the host's remarking, in an apologetic tone, that owing to the unusual cares which his new projects involved, he feared he should not be able, after all, to indulge himself in the proposed excursion to Jerusalem.

"I fear I have been very selfish in this matter," continued the simple-minded man, as he observed the expression of regret which crossed Meredith's countenance. "I have allowed you to linger in this neighbourhood an unreasonable length of time, awaiting my movements only to disappoint you in the end. I was perfectly frank in my intentions, that you will not doubt; but to be candid with you, I do not see —"

"M. Trefoil," cried Meredith, abruptly interrupting him, *while the colour mounted into the Englishman's face, and his eyes were for an instant turned away from the garden to which they had hitherto been transfixed*, "do not mortify me by *apologies*; your frankness challenges mine. It is I only who

have been selfish in this delay. I have trespassed most unconscionably on your hospitality. I have had it in my mind to depart a hundred times: I am ashamed of my own weakness, for I dare not stay — and yet —” he paused, then concluded with the vehement utterance of one from whom the truth is wrung in spite of himself, “I cannot go.”

M. Trefoil looked confounded, less at the young man's words than at his manner, for he had withdrawn a few steps as he finished speaking, and stood leaning over the parapet to protect himself from the puzzled and questioning gaze which the manufacturer fixed upon him. But the simplicity of M. Trefoil was not diminished however his equanimity might be disturbed by his guest's impetuous outburst, and preferring to give to it the most natural and agreeable interpretation, he approached, laid his hand on Meredith's shoulder, and exclaimed, with affectionate warmth, — “You are not a man of the world, Mr. Meredith; you like our simple ways? So much the better. El Fureidis has charms for you. Then there you and I sympathize. Your English friends may perhaps be wondering what keeps you here, but I —”

He had proceeded thus far when he was checked by the sound of a musical voice and laugh, and obedient both to this and to the fixedness of the Englishman's gaze, he gave a quick glance over the parapet into the garden below. A glow of loving pride overspread the father's face as he beheld Havilah, her graceful throat arched, and her head slightly thrown back as she looked upwards, not to the height of the parapet, but to the latticed window where the invalid Ianthe reclined watching the motions of her daughter. The garlands of flowers were completed, and the gazelle, standing erect beside his mistress, triumphantly supported one around his neck, while Havilah, laughing at the little creature's air of participation in the display, held up the other also for her mother's inspection.

Never had the mountain girl appeared either in her fond father's or her admiring lover's eyes so sweetly, yet royal

beautiful. The latter now saw her for the first time in her mother's national dress, — the modern Greek costume, which she wore only on festive occasions. If anything could have added to the dignity of her erect carriage, it was the little embroidered cap beneath which were looped the massive braids of her dark hair, and whose heavy gold tassels nearly swept her shoulders. The gold bordering of her velvet jacket, and the threads of the same rich material interwoven in her broad Persian sash, glistened in the sunshine, and the silken pattern wrought upon her full muslin skirt rivalled the floral show of nature around her. But more than all the aids of a becoming toilette, the glow of an innocent heart lent loveliness to her features, and sympathy with others' joy gave animation and vivacity to her every movement. She did not see her father or his companion, and the smiles which lit up her face were meant only for her mother.

M. Trefoil gazed upon her a moment in silence, then turned towards Meredith, and the latter looking up at the same instant, their eyes met. Meredith attempted no concealment; his countenance spoke volumes: with one emphatic glance in the direction of Havilah, he took up the conversation where it had dropped, and said impressively, "Can you wonder?"

The light which suddenly shone into the honest mind of M. Trefoil was as complete as had been his previous blindness. For one moment he looked bewildered, almost overwhelmed with astonishment. Then, as Meredith was about to turn away, with that air of reserve and even of mortification which a haughty and sensitive man feels when he has humbled himself to the confession of a secret, the sympathetic heart of M. Trefoil was moved; he started forward, grasped both the young man's hands in his and exclaimed, "No, I cannot wonder; nor will you be ashamed to confess it, if, as I suspect, you but share the weakness of us all, — the mother, Father Lapierre, the village peasants, those old gray monks, that wild boy of the desert, and even the little gazelle, if —" he

hesitated, looked searchingly in Meredith's face, then concluded abruptly, "if you love the child."

"I do," was the proud Englishman's answer.

"Does she know it?" asked M. Trefoil, earnestly, a shade of paternal anxiety marking the countenance usually so carelessly confiding.

"She does not," replied Meredith, "nor have I any knowledge of her sentiments; until this moment, indeed, I have never fully understood my own."

"That is well," rejoined the father in a relieved tone, at the same time withdrawing his hands from Meredith's, clasping them behind his back, and giving several affirmative nods. "That is well, Mr. Meredith. She is such a child! such a mere child! what should she know of love and matrimony? You did right to speak to me first. You have acted like a man of honour as you are. And you shall have her, my good friend; I give you my hand on that. I did not realize that my little rose-bud had ripened into a rose. I had not dreamed—" and he breathed a deep sigh — "of a stranger from another land seeking to pluck my blossom from the parent-tree. I never would have believed —" and the broad chest heaved convulsively, while the voice grew choked and husky, "that I would have given my darling to the first man that asked for her; but I can't refuse you, Mr. Meredith — no, on my soul I can't; you have stolen the father's heart, and you shall have the child."

"But the child's heart?" said Meredith, speaking in a tone that was far from elated, and which would have acted as a check upon a less sanguine man than M. Trefoil. "You forget that that I have neither stolen nor won."

"Tut, tut, man; don't disparage yourself!" said M. Trefoil, slapping the Englishman cheerily on the shoulder, and resuming his wonted air of easy unconcern. "Is such a face and figure as yours to go a begging for a wife? Why, if I were a girl I'd marry you myself, my fine fellow; and is Havilah blind and deaf, as cold as a stone, that she should close her tender little heart against the man whom even her dull

father considers a fit hero for a romance? No, no; I'll venture to say you have not been paying your court in vain, Mr. Meredith. At all events, we'll soon come at the truth, for the mother must know, and I'll speak of the matter to her to-night."

"By no means, I beg of you," entreated Meredith, with a distressed countenance and a startled, deprecating gesture.

"You are not in earnest then?" said M. Trefoil, with frank simplicity.

"Never was man more so," replied Meredith in an impatient tone; "but give me time, I beseech of you. Let me discover the truth for myself."

"What! Talk of love to the child! Impossible! That is not our oriental fashion. She would be as much shocked and startled as a desert fawn at the whizzing of an arrow. You would destroy your own hopes. So not a word to the child. Let me speak to the mother, and if you wish for an advocate, let it be Ianthe."

Meredith bit his lip. His face was dark with an uneasy frown. He felt that he had committed himself, and was bound to submit to the dictation of this unsophisticated man. He had no positive wish to retract his words, to recall his confession, and yet all the sentiment and romance, as well as all the fastidious reserve of his character, rebelled against the position in which he found himself placed.

This dissatisfaction and annoyance, however, were either imputed simply to thoughtful earnestness, or were wholly unobserved by M. Trefoil, who, having now recovered from his first bewilderment of surprise, and having given a definite and practical form to Meredith's involuntary acknowledgment, proceeded to indulge in the characteristic exultations and hopes to which the occasion gave rise.

Good, easy, obtuse soul! He little suspected that the *flattering protest* with which he hesitated not to assure his *guest* that he was the man of all the world whom he would have chosen for a son-in-law, caused the aspirant for this near *relationship* to wince more painfully than he would have done

at the closest inquisition of his character and claims. The elated parent could not have imagined that when, with artless garrulity, he indulged prophetic visions of the future, the fastidious Englishman shrank from them as uncalled for and premature. The happy pleasure-schemer failed to observe that at his jocular allusion to the day when the village bells should ring a louder and a merrier peal in honour of the handsome Frank and his Lebanon bride, the features of the handsome Frank were crossed with a nervous thrill as if the merry bells had suddenly rung out a discord.

Yet so it was. For, strangely enough, the deepest emotion Meredith had ever known — an emotion the depth of which he himself had not yet fathomed, — was so overlaid with habitual and even morbid sensitiveness, that where a less haughty and fastidious nature would have gloried triumphantly, he only felt irritated, trifled with, and repelled.

Meredith was not a vain man. Half an hour before he would have drawn encouragement from the belief that any person living entertained of him so high an opinion as Havilah's father hesitated not to express. He was not a sanguine man. In the deeper crisis of his life he had ever been one who apprehended failure rather than success, but now the proud, dreary, poetic heart, which had secretly invoked hope to its aid, chafed under, and well-nigh disclaimed, the prompt paternal acceptance which robbed him even of the pleasures of pursuit; and if anything could have taught him to undervalue the object for which he was striving, it was the undisguised readiness with which the prize was stripped of its romance, and thrust upon him almost before he could be said to have sought it.

So while the light-hearted manufacturer rattled carelessly on, his graver companion stood by him in dignified silence, too honest to feign sympathy in M. Trefoil's excessive exultation, too proudly courteous to interrupt him by look or gesture, or venture to set limits to the schemes which had sprung from the confessions of an unguarded moment.

But our hero's natural impetuosity was not proof again
El Fureidis.

the imperturbable coolness with which M. Trefoil presumed to refer the young couple's fate to arbitration, and this point being once more emphatically alluded to, the restraint which Meredith had imposed upon himself suddenly gave way, and he broke forth in an earnest and even vehement expostulation, inveighing against further suspense in a matter which had gone so far, protesting against submitting his destiny to any one save Havilah herself, and claiming the right to plead his own cause.

"There is no occasion for suspense at all," responded M. Trefoil, with a persistency none the less provoking that it was wholly compounded of good-humour. "I will speak to Ianthé this very day; and as to pleading your own cause," he continued in a persuasive tone, "you have had opportunity enough for this month past, and shall have again."

He would have continued his argument, but Meredith interrupted him, and with a gesture expressive of intense irritation, exclaimed, "You acknowledge that I have had every opportunity; you must acknowledge too, that I have honourably forborne to make use of it. Why not, then, trust to my discretion for the future? I hate suspense, to be sure, but this haste, this interference is — is —" he stammered a little, turned very red, then added abruptly, "to tell the truth, I was not prepared for it. I have been accustomed to rule my own actions."

He had forgotten himself, and gone too far. The man of dull perceptions was enlightened; the good-natured man was wounded. His injured feelings were betrayed in the apologetic yet self-respectful modesty with which he instantly responded in these words: "I am sorry I have seemed to you in haste, Mr. Meredith. I assure you I am in no haste to part with my child. Perhaps you wish to retract; in that case we will consider the past conversation unsaid."

It was now Meredith's turn to be mortified and abashed. He was a gentleman, the descendant of a long line of gentlemen; he began to fear he was disporting himself like a trifler and a clown. He lost no time, therefore, in renewing his

warm protestations and hopes. The injured father was reassured by the unmistakable earnestness with which the young man disclaimed any hesitation in his choice or the pursuit of its object; and this little misunderstanding resulted, as such contre-temps not unfrequently do, in the most amiable and by nature the most yielding of the parties being the one to carry his point. For, as if to atone for his doubts, M. Trefoil's next movement was to lay his hand affectionately on Meredith's shoulder, accompanying the action with the words, "Forgive me, my dear fellow; I did not mean to wrong you; it was only a father's sensitive pride: you own that I have reason to be proud of my child, and as to the interference, — since you term it such — I wish only to give your suit the sanction of our approval. Havilah is a dutiful girl, and habituated to eastern customs. So let her mother have the first word. I do not ask it for myself," he continued, persuasively, "only for Ianthe's sake. Hark! that is little Geita's voice calling to let me know that the procession is moving." Then, as if taking it for granted that a full submission to his wishes had been conceded, he added: "I will whisper a word in Ianthe's ear before I go to meet the villagers. Remember, my good fellow, until you hear from me again, not a word to the child;" and M. Trefoil cordially shook Meredith's half-reluctant hand, and pressing his own finger meaningfully to his lip, as it to enforce silence, hastened down the staircase.

Meredith turned on his heel, folded his arms, drew his hat over his brow, and commenced walking rapidly up and down the terrace.

His countenance was far from that of a favoured suitor furnished with full credentials by the father of his mistress. Aggrieved, dissatisfied, indignant, he felt himself robbed of a prerogative both as an Englishman and a lover. The hot blood mounted to his temples as he contemplated the secret and until now well guarded secret of his passion for the mountain girl held up to the light of common day, to be weighed, discussed, and criticised; his pride was stung to the quick.

the thought that he had involuntarily suffered himself to become a mere puppet in a love drama, and the heart which had been all aglow with fervour while in pursuit of his fairy bride, was chilled by the suspicion that the hand so confidently promised him might be placed in his not by choice, but by the fiat of a family council.

Let it be said in justice to the candour of Meredith's disposition, that his vague sense of injury was in no degree aggravated by his imagining himself the dupe or tool in any preconcerted matrimonial stratagem. He did not for a moment doubt the single-mindedness of his honest host. The good man's simplicity might even have been a source of amusement to the young Englishman had it been exercised in any less a matter than one which affected his own dearest interests.

Still, despite his generosity — and he was generous to a fault — it cannot be denied that, as he paced restlessly up and down the narrow terrace, his thoughts insensibly wandered to those broad acres, that princely rent-roll destined one day to become his.

The knowledge of his fair heritage was no secret to M. Trefoil. Meredith knew the weight it had exercised in marriage a matrimonial scheme vainly projected for him heretofore: could he be sure that in the present instance it would not bias the inclinations of an ambitious parent, possibly those of his child?

With inward misgivings the young man for the first time strove to picture the mountain girl amid the scenes of his English home. Would the gay wild flower of the Lebanon bear transplanting to stern British soil? might not the bright bud of the Orient live amid the stately decorum of an old baronial hall?

Before him in this moment of self-questioning rose the image of his dignified, aristocratic father. He had ever been lenient towards the son whose contradictory tastes had thus far disappointed him at every step. But would he be likely to smile approval on the foreign alliance which he would

naturally deem the crowning and least pardonable eccentricity of all?

With a deeper prophetic instinct still, Meredith called to mind his tall, high browed-sister, proud as himself, and far more conventional. Would not her cold, unsisterly jealousy send a sudden chill to the heart of her brother's sunny bride?

Unwelcome visions were they all; the offspring of an imagination heated and ruffled by the events of the morning. Still for the moment they exercised their sway, and it was with a self-accusing, half-repentant pang, rather than with an ecstatic hope, that Meredith dreamed himself the successful suitor of Havilah.

Fie on him for a presumptuous cold-hearted lover! Yet stay; let us remember ere we condemn him that lovers are not men. Let us have patience too. These prudential considerations float only on the surface. They have not yet probed the depths of his secret heart. We do not know the true man. He does not yet know himself. But hark! what sound is that which breaks in upon his meditation, checks his restless step, and transfixes him at the extremity of the parapet? It is merely the harsh music of a drum and fife accompanied by the shouts of a village crowd. What sight is it which causes a sudden kindling gaze in his deep-blue eye, and banishes from his mind every other object save that to which he directs his straining vision? It is simply the reflection of the sunlight on the gold tassels of a little Greek cap; it is nothing but the flutter of a muslin robe which vanished from the garden a half-hour ago, to reappear in the foreground of the nuptial procession now winding slowly up the steep bride-path which skirts the mulberry grove. There is a moment's struggle between pride and passion; for a moment the aristocrat and the lover are at war; for a moment the indignant Englishman leans moodily over the parapet, strives to still the beating of his heart, and vows himself as alien to the scene. A moment more, and where are the harassing visions which so lately disturbed his mind? They b

melted as the mountain mist before the sunshine of morning. Where are his hesitations and his doubts? Scattered to the four winds of heaven.

Obedient to an impulse stronger than them all, he has bounded down the staircase, crossed the garden, and gained the topmost terrace of the mulberry grove which commands a prospect of the rocky pathway up which the procession is slowly filing. For an instant they are hid behind a huge boulder which causes an abrupt angle in the narrow pass. Then suddenly they emerge once more into view, led by M. Trefoil and his daughter, who are closely followed by the gay and noisy train of villagers, in the midst of whom walks the bride, modestly bending low her head, which is covered by a long white veil.

Straightening his tall figure to its full height, Meredith lifts his hat, and waves it in the air in token of welcome. The simple peasantry, gratified by so unexpected an act of condescension, send up a simultaneous shout. Availing himself of the momentary excitement, M. Trefoil adroitly slips his hand from that of his daughter, and with an arch look and expressive gesture, motions to Meredith to take his place. Quick to comprehend, and prompt to obey, the young man leaps down the terrace, eager to assume the office of the manufacturer, who heated and out of breath, stations himself on the lower stone of a flight of steps which leads upwards to his own premises; and, here rejoicing in his little feat of diplomacy, reviews the procession, and salutes each couple as they pass. Havilah, smiling with innocent amusement at the impromptu manner in which M. Trefoil had summoned a substitute and beaten a retreat, placed her hand unhesitatingly and confidingly in that of her father's guest. With throbbing heart he clasps the little hand in his, holds it as firmly as he dares, and triumphing in the coveted possession, outdoes the gayest of the throng in the elation of spirits with which he conducts his lovely partner, and marshals the peasant band over the heights leading to the village church. It is a merry festival. All hearts are light and happy, all

faces bright with smiles, — all save one, and that one unobserved by all. It is the bronzed visage of the Arab boy, who, as the bridal train moves on, slides stealthily down from the boulder, whence he has watched the scene; and with scowling brow, clenched fist, and menacing gesture, creeps away with noiseless, cat-like tread, to secure some other vantage point, where unperceived he may play the jealous spy, and whet the growing hatred which he secretly nourishes in his wild and untamed breast.

CHAPTER XII

Mother and Child.

EVENING had settled over the little village. The primitive people, whose festivities, like their labours, subsided at the going down of the sun, had scattered to their several homes, and weary with merry-making had sought rest in stillness, if not yet in slumber.

Alone on her couch beside the latticed window lay Ianthe, listening for the returning footstep of her child. The casement was closed to exclude the chilly autumn night air, and a light brasier of coals in the centre of the apartment created an agreeable warmth, and at the same time diffused the soft odour of some fragrant incense, one of those gentle perfumes grateful to oriental senses. On a bracket in a remote corner burned an alabaster lamp, but the subdued light which it shed was feeble in comparison with that of the clear moonbeams which poured in at the window, and illumined the face of the invalid, the pallor of whose features, discerned in this silvery light, was scarcely equalled in whiteness by the snowy ermine which bordered her silken pelisse.

She had not listened long when a slight figure was reflected on the opposite wall, a bounding step was fancied, rather than heard, so lightly did it tread the triple-piled carpet, and then softly sinking on a heap of cushions beside her mother, Havilah put up her rosy mouth for the accustom

kiss. Noiselessly as she had come, her presence seemed to scatter life and brightness through the room before so utterly, almost oppressively silent. The moonbeams looked less cold as they were reflected on the gold tassels of her cap, and brought out in clear radiance the rich embroidery of her jacket. Her dancing step too betrayed innocent glee, and the tale which her lips were eager to tell was all written in her eyes. She had passed such a happy day. The sun had shewn so brightly, the bride had looked so fair, the bridegroom so gay and proud, the flowers that were scattered over the happy pair at the altar had been so beautiful and sweet, the villagers had seemed so glad! With her white arms crossed upon her mother's lap, and her beaming face upturned to the moonlight, Havilah told how opportunely their English friend had joined the bridal escort, and how joyously his voice had rung in the congratulatory shout. With eager accent she informed her mother of the munificent sum which he had contributed to swell Hendia's slender dowry; exclaiming at the same time, with artless wonder, on the untold riches which their guest must possess, since he could thus generously portion a village bride.

With girlish merriment she described the scene of wild confusion at the moment when the young men and maidens, according to custom, showered the wedded couple with handfuls of corn and raisins, and her unchecked laugh rang through the apartment as she told how Asaad had thrown high into the air the pomegranate, whose possession was believed to impart the marriage contagion; how the young men had watched for its fall, ambitious to secure the prize, but how the tall Englishman had outwitted and vanquished them all, by bounding upwards to an astonishing height, and catching the precious fruit in his hand before it had reached the ground.

Ianthe smiled at the significant character of this wonderful feat on the part of the Englishman, smoothed back her daughter's hair, studied her artless features attentively for a moment, then said, "Some bright day will dawn ere long

when the bridegroom will come hither to seek a bride, whose skilful fingers shall we then employ to wreath an nuptial chaplet for my little Havilah?"

The little Havilah playfully shook her head, as if she already felt the weight of the garland, and sought to displace it from her brow, at the same time saying, with a sweet mingling of archness and filial devotion, "No, no; the mountain bird will not leave its mother's nest to fly away with a stranger."

"But the mother must forsake her fledgling ere long," said Ianthe, gravely and solemnly. "Her wings are spread already, and her spirit soon must soar. The eagle which has seen her young happy with its mate, looks not back as she flies upwards to the sun."

"When God takes mothers," said Havilah, in a whisper, her eyes at the same time filling with tears, "himself only can fill their place."

"True, my child," rejoined her mother, tenderly; "but God has his instruments of mercy; He sends in due season his messengers of love to bind up the wounds of his little ones. Yes, Havilah," she added, cautiously scanning the girl's face as she spoke, "there may be a friend — ay, an earthly friend — closer to one's heart than a mother."

"No, never! never!" exclaimed Havilah, vehemently, clasping her arms round her mother, and hiding her head in her bosom.

"Did not Hendia leave the good Tyiby with smiles," questioned Ianthe, "and go joyously to the house of Asaad? And will not my daughter too smile through her tears on the bridal-day that gives her a stronger arm to lean on than that of her invalid mother?"

"Does mamma indeed talk to me of a husband?" cried Havilah, lifting up to the light a face which suddenly became suffused with crimson as she encountered the scrutinizing gaze which Ianthe fixed upon her.

"When lovers plead, mothers cannot be silent," said Ianthe, meaningly; "and he that comes in honour to lay

brave heart at a young girl's feet, deserves an advocate and a hearing."

"Who comes — what heart; ah! mamma is jesting with her child," exclaimed Havilah, a coy tremulous smile creeping over her features.

"Mamma speaks truth, and she must no longer call herself a child whom the noble Englishman seeks to make his wife," said Ianthe, a certain degree of maternal pride betraying itself in the tone with which she announced a worthy suitor, and asserted her daughter's new dignity of womanhood.

She was startled at the effect of her words. The head just now resting passively on her breast was raised with an almost convulsive movement; the slight form, trembling with agitation, slid from the arms which enfolded it; and the face in which youthful joy had so lately been reflected wore a mingled expression of dread and pain, as Havilah, kneeling beside Ianthe's couch, clasped her hands fervently together, exclaimed, "What I, Havilah! that proud stranger's wife, — no, no, my mother, never."

"Hush! hush! my child, the guest of many weeks must not be termed a stranger; and if he is proud, how much prouder may my mountain girl be to have won his love?"

"He is a stranger to my heart," was the prompt reply; "how then can I have won his love? Mamma is deceived."

"Mamma is not deceived," said Ianthe, speaking with grave emphasis. "Mr. Meredith loves my Havilah, and, like a noble suitor as he is, has sought her fairly at her father's hands. It does not become my daughter to answer rashly, or repulse with childish haste the honourable man who has the approval of both her parents to enforce his claims."

The feverish glow subsided on Havilah's face, the impetuous expression was subdued to one of much humility at this implied rebuke, and she listened in deferential silence while her mother continued, accompanying her words with grace-

ful oriental gesture. "My Havilah is a mountain sapling, swayed by every breeze;" and Ianthe's thin white hand as she spoke was waved rapidly to and fro; "the Englishman is the granite rock which stems the dashing torrent;" and here the mother gave emphasis to her words by laying her hand firmly and impressively on the young girl's shoulder. "Were it not maidenly, were it not wise, that the slight thing of a summer's growth should beware how she refuse to plant the roots of her young life in so grand, so sure a foundation?"

"The Englishman is manly, generous, and brave," said Havilah, musingly.

"He comes of a lordly race," exclaimed Ianthe, eagerly catching up and seconding her daughter's commendatory words, for the mother's heart, her hopes, her wishes, were all with Meredith. "I have heard it said that nature boasts no nobler sons than the men of his British isle; and he degrades not his ancestral stock."

"He is rich, and learned, and wise," continued Havilah, in a sort of pensive soliloquy, speaking in a low minor key, which gave a touching plaintiveness to her words. "He is respectful to the old, and bountiful to the poor, and gentle to the mountain girl, who would gladly repay his kindness, but cannot."

"Cannot, Havilah! Does my daughter count up her lover's virtues, and sound his praises, acknowledge the worth of his heart, then thoughtlessly pierce it with an arrow?"

"Havilah sighs over his virtues," was the grieved reply; "she praises him through grateful tears, and if an arrow of her sending wounds his heart, it will rebound and strike her own." Her eye was moist, her voice unsteady with emotion, ere she finished speaking. Ianthe was puzzled, doubtful.

"Alas! my daughter," she exclaimed, "why then this needless pain? Why cannot you return the Englishman's love, and both be blest?"

"My mother!" said Havilah, with a solemn earnestness which gave dignity to her youthful features, "do you remember the steep-flowing banks of the Barûk stream, w^h

rushes down our Lebanon cliffs, and pierces through the heart of the distant valley, till it loses itself in the wild Leontes? Do you remember how, in long parallel lines, the opposite shores of the narrow glen go winding together through the mountain pass, ever near, yet ever parted, sometimes almost meeting above the dividing torrent, yet never melting into one?"

"I remember them well, my child; what then?"

"Like the deep ravine, the cold impassable gulf which separates the twin banks of the Barûk, is the deep dark barrier which sunders my heart from the Englishman's."

"You dream, my child," exclaimed Ianthe, rising upon one elbow, and gazing steadily at Havilah. "What possible barrier can exist between the daughter of Augustine Trefoil and his familiar and honoured guest. Either your fancy wanders, Havilah, or you wrong the Englishman."

As Ianthe spoke, Havilah had risen from her kneeling attitude, and with a slow, almost majestic movement, quite unlike her usual rapid motions, she straightened her slight figure to its full height, threw back her head, so that her whole face was lit up by the moonlight, and with the air of an inspired prophetess, said fervently, "I wrong him not, for I judge him not; but his pathway and mine lie apart. His God is here," and she laid her forefinger on her forehead; "mine here," and she clasped her hands upon her heart. "I might scatter his gold with lavish hand, might strain my mind to comprehend his mental height; my earthly heart might glory in his fame, but he could never be the husband of my soul."

Ianthe was awed, was overwhelmed, and could only ejaculate, "My child! my little one! whence so much foresight, so much knowledge? Who has taught you this?"

"A voice that whispers to me here," answered Havilah, pressing her clasped hands more fervently still upon her heart.

"It tells me that, like the Barûk banks, the Englishman and his Lebanon bride might dwell beside one another in outward harmony; we might share earth's sunshine and showers; the towers on our bosoms might mingle their fragrance; here and

there the surface of our lives might blend; strangers might approach the brink, and have no suspicion of the disturbing current between; but from the fountain whence our race began, down to the eternal ocean at its close, the cold stream, the dark gulf would divide us still."

The fire of an earnest nature, the solemn conviction of a truth, gave warmth to Havilah's tones and elevation to her manner as she uttered these words; but as if in the pause which ensued she recognized her own unwonted temerity of speech, she suffered her arms to droop at her side, cast down her eyes, on whose fringes the great tears were trembling, and stood before her mother in all the humble docility of childhood.

Ianthe leaned back upon her pillows, gazed absently upwards at the ceiling, and for a solemn space silence between the two continued unbroken. Well might the mother pause awhile to muse on the revelation made to her in her child! Could this be she who had hitherto been guided and led as the lamb of the household flock? Could this be she whose infantine graces had at once rejoiced the heart, and caused it to tremble at her youth and inexperience? Could this be she whom but a moment before her anxious parent had thought it fitting to remind of her ripening womanhood? Could it be indeed, that while the aged, the prudent, and the wise, had been deceived by an exterior conformity to truth on the part of their foreign guest, this girl of seventeen had by the unerring instinct of her guileless soul read deeper into the mysteries of his nature, measured him by a loftier standard, and now, rising superior to every timid doubt, and scorning every earth-born ambition, gave full and fearless utterance to the holiest convictions of her Being?

That Havilah's words fell as from prophetic lips was evident from the fact that they carried instant assurance to the heart of Ianthe, leaving her neither the power nor the will to gainsay them. It was not without a pang, however, that *she yielded to the weight of a convincing truth, and saw in it the destruction of her cherished hopes. Most bitterly did the sense of disappointment force itself upon her, as after a fr*

moments of self-communing she turned her mild eyes mournfully towards Havilah, and beheld her no longer moved by the momentary inspiration which had given her a dignity beyond her years, but standing in that attitude of childlike dependency and trust habitual to her when waiting on her parents' words. All the mother's tender concern and solicitude were aroused as she gazed on the girl's youthful, loving, confiding face. All the events of Ianthe's own wedded experience passed before her in quick review. The fruitless wanderings, the long years of poverty, the untold privations, the mental anxiety, the broken health, in a word, all the reverses of fortune which she too well knew had been due to the recklessness and improvidence of him who must soon be left the widowed parent and sole guardian of Havilah.

In the protection and love of their English guest, the helpless, wasting invalid had hailed a shield for her husband against the ills of fortune, and a refuge from every earthly exposure which might threaten her innocent child. Ianthe was a devout and humble Christian, but the deep yearnings of her human heart prevailed, and for a moment the wife and mother triumphed over the saint, as she exclaimed, in a tone of desperate and final appeal,

"If the voice in your heart speaks truth, Havilah, God and nature forbid the banns; but oh, my precious one, by all the love and duty you owe your mother, do not listen to any false or suspicious whisper which bids you spurn the rich offering laid at your feet this day. England is a Christian land her sons know no other faith; we have never witnessed any meanness or deceit in our guest, he bears himself generous and nobly towards all; M. Lapierre trusts him, so does your father, why should Havilah, the youngest among us, be first, the only one to doubt?"

"He is true and loyal to me," exclaimed Havilah; "what that he were so to God!"

"God's holy word is ever in his hand," rejoined Ianthe, "and nature is to him an open book, which he reverence

"He has a scholar's cold faith in scripture," said Havilah, "and an artist's worship of beauty, and a poet's dream of truth; but who can trust the stream which has no living fountain, the fruit which is hollow at the core, the spirit which is not linked to the Highest? To the unbelieving soul beauty wears a taint, knowledge is but ignorance, truth a lie, and what can he know of love who has never drunk from its sacred springs?"

"But he loves you, Havilah," said her mother, half reproachfully.

"Oh, love is a strange mystery of the soul!" exclaimed Havilah; "he loves perhaps as he can love, — as the breeze loves the flower, and the bird loves the sun, but not as the Holy One loves in heaven or on earth. Oh, my mother, I honour his genius, admire his gifts, am grateful for his love; but my spirit testifies not with his, and for him, alas! my heart is cold."

"I must leave you alone then, my darling," said Ianthe, mournfully. "I had trusted" (oh how vain are our earthly trusts!) "that this wealthy, this learned, this influential stranger in El Fureidîs was the appointed instrument of Heaven, to enrich, to elevate, to protect my child. And must I depart and leave her alone, — alone to bear a mother's loss, alone to strengthen her bereaved father, and to soothe his grief?"

"No, not alone," responded Havilah, speaking not in a tone of asseveration, but in that spirit of petition and entreaty which rendered each utterance a prayer. "The Englishman is rich, but He who cares for the lily and the sparrow will suffer none of his children to want. The Englishman has a mind which excites a simple girl to wonder and to awe, but the wisdom of this world is but folly compared with that great fountain of knowledge at which every child may drink. The Englishman may boast of power and of high descent, but He in whom I put my trust is the King of kings."

Ianthe's heart was calmed, fortified, subdued, as she read in Havilah's face the evidence of a soul strong in the Lord

own might; and rising from her couch, she laid her hands in solemn blessing on the young girl's head, saying, "It is enough; I am satisfied. The Englishman's suit shall be named no more. I would have yielded, my child, to the protection of a human arm; shall I doubt the arm of the Lord?"

A long embrace succeeded, and a tender good-night, and then, leaving her mother to solitude and rest, Havilah ran to her own apartment, threw herself on her cushioned divan, and the unnatural calmness she had hitherto maintained giving way now that all occasion for self-restraint was passed, she indulged in a long fit of weeping. Not that any secret sentiment of partiality for Meredith warred with her sense of duty, for she had spoken the simple truth in the interview with her mother; but all the sympathies of her susceptible nature were aroused, and giving way to a flood of sorrowful emotion, she wept for her parents' disappointment, wept at her own seeming ingratitude, wept more bitterly than all for the grief, the mortification of him concerning whom she had divined the truth, that for this, as for all life's trials, he knew no antidote or consolation save a fatalist's philosophy and a stoic's pride.

Ianthe, meanwhile, the conflict in her spirit passed, lay on her couch calm, prayerful, and at peace. She was joined ere long by M. Lapierre, who, in his double capacity of medical and spiritual adviser, seldom failed to visit the invalid at evening. To the venerable pastor she unburdened her heart; and had one painful doubt, one lingering regret still disturbed the serene submission of her soul, it would have been for ever dispelled by the verdict of the holy man, who listened attentively to her narrative with the air of one to whom a weighty question is for the first time presented, gazed thoughtfully on the door awhile, then lifting his undimmed eyes to the mother's face, gave solemn confirmation to Havilah's decision by affirming, in words from which, brief as *they were*, there could be no appeal, — "Ianthe, the child is *right!*"

CHAPTER XIII.

Eptedeem.

THE fickleness of the human mind, its susceptibility to outward and accidental impressions, is never more fully demonstrated than during a period of suspense. We have seen how Meredith's shy and sensitive distrust in the merits of his suit had given place to an unwarrantable confidence; how this blind confidence had in its turn startled him into a nervous and shrinking dread of his own success, and how both these emotions had been suddenly dispelled by the magical influence of Havilah's presence and smiles. Not less contradictory was the mental state of the ringleader of nuptial festivities at El Fureidis, and that of the reserved and solitary man who sat in his room at nightfall, musing on the events of the day. The one was roused, exhilarated, transported beyond himself by the intoxication of the scene and hour. In the full enjoyment of the society which he most craved, privileged beyond others, and unconscious of a rival, he had forgotten past and future in the certainty of present rapture. It was but a natural reaction which, when the day was done, and the festive drama ended, left him, who never in his life before had played a part on such a stage, oppressed with loneliness, despondency, and that mortifying suspicion of his own unbecoming levity which is sure to take possession of the proud and serious man who has committed himself to a full participation in any extravagant show of mirth and gaiety.

Moreover, each moment that he had continued in the companionship of Havilah had seemed the postponement of that unwelcome crisis, that formal and delegated proclamation of his hopes to which he had been involuntarily hurried by M. Trefoil. Poor Meredith could not but feel a pang of regret and *uneasiness* at the thought that he had for the last time *secretly nursed his passion for the beautiful girl, and that*

El Fureidis.

when they met again he must, perforce, present himself before her in the light of an acknowledged lover.

This idea acted as anything but a sedative after the excitements and fatigues of the day. The young man's blood, too, was heated by exercise and exposure to the Syrian sun, and it was in vain that he struggled with the restlessness which agitated him. Had he been a sentimental boy, he might have cheated time by wandering forth in the moonlight, and watching the lamp which flickered in his beloved one's window. But Meredith was a man of thirty, an Englishman too, and an aristocrat, and the romance of his nature, deep as it was, lay not upon the surface. If he could not be calm he could at least resolve to be; if he could not be patient, he could content himself as if he were so.

He assumed a comfortable position therefore on his divan, called for his narghileh, puffed regularly at it, and watched the curling volumes of smoke as they floated upwards in the moonlight, with as much intensity as if these mimic clouds were slowly unrolling scrolls, on which were written the successive pages of his future destiny. This endeavour to cheat himself into composure was so successful that, the pipe-tube resting idly in his hand for a moment, the servant who came to bring him coffee stepped noiselessly, believing him to be making *kef*, to have reached, indeed, the ultimate stage in that process which signifies, in Syrian parlance, the luxury of repose. Even lynx-eyed Abdoul, who presented himself to report concerning the welfare of the Arab horses still within his charge, paused at the open alcove, and, his penetration for once at fault, was deceived by his master's affectation of ease, and with an Oriental's deference to slumber, left his errand unfulfilled, and crept away as stealthily as he had come.

But though the feint might impose upon others, it could not long beguile its principal object, or soothe him to self-oblivion, and the jealous malice of Abdoul would have been gratified could he have seen the discontented and irritable haste with which, the moment that he was freed from the

boy's espionage, Meredith pushed his narghileh-stand impatiently from him, and rising abruptly from the divan, paced his room with folded arms and rapid steps — a proceeding which, during the remaining hours of the night, alternated with intervals of forced tranquillity and unrefreshing rest.

Towards morning a new resolution seized him, and the gray dawn was but just tinging the highest cliffs of the Lebanon when, donning his hat and shooting-jacket, and flinging his gun over his shoulder, he sallied forth in search of Abdoul, whom he proposed to make his companion on a hunting-excursion among the mountains. It was no difficult matter to discover the boy, whose invariable lodging was a little hut, a mere recess in the more spacious apartment allotted to his own and Meredith's horses. A word, too, was sufficient to rouse him from his light sleep, and the quick shake which he gave his little limbs and flowing drapery, with the hasty settling of his white turban, were the only adjustment which his toilette demanded, for the Arab's striped abaya is his nightly coverlid, and he may almost be said to sleep with lance in rest. It was a more serious undertaking, however, to prepare the horses for duty, to groom them with that nicety of skill which makes the coat of the desert courser rival a polished mirror, to caparison the animals with their elaborate housings, to hang around their necks the game-bags, powder-flasks, and numerous other requisites of a shooting-excursion — no one of which was forgotten by the thoughtful and practised Abdoul. All these were cares which would not admit of haste, and the imperturbable gravity of the youth's demeanour could not be disturbed, nor his deliberate movements quickened by the impatience of Meredith, who, having loosened and fed the dogs which were kennelled near by, was compelled to await the pleasure and convenience of his friendly, and, in some respects, arbitrary servitor.

The sun had just reached the snowy crests of the mountains as the two huntsmen left the village behind them, and wound down the precipitous bridle-path that led through the

adjacent valley, and thence to the more closely wooded cliffs beyond.

Morning had illuminated the heights of the Lebanon, which glittered like hoar-frost, but the mantle of night yet rested on her valleys, and each deep ravine was curtained with a long veil of mist. High up in the blue ether the lark was singing a melodious song; far down might be dimly discerned the majestic eagle or the greedy vulture, hovering expectantly along the filmy wreaths of fog which were soon destined to disperse and disclose whatever prey or carrion might lie concealed in the rocky depths below.

Every tree and shrub glittered with dew, every blossom and vine distilled fragrance, and the breeze which came laden with sweets was at the same time so fresh and health-giving as to carry with it an invigorating glow, a fuller sense of vitality. Meredith could not be insensible to the inspiring freshness of nature. The fever which had marked his night vigils subsided as the cool air played about his temples, and the refreshing influence of morning stole in upon his spirit. Life, the fresh life of the woods and glens, was everywhere astir. The sound of the horses' feet started out whole coveys of redlegged partridges; the quail was heard whirring up from the thick underwood which lined the pathway; flocks of pigeons were cooing amid the branches of the distant fir-trees, and now and then a nimble hare darted before the eyes of the huntsman.

The American Indian is not more quickly fired by the detection of an enemy's trail than the aristocratic young Englishman by the scent of game. Thus, preoccupied as he was, the force of habit and instinct had somewhat the effect of sportsmanlike zeal, and half unconsciously Meredith reined in his horse and poised his musket with artistic precision.

The mental agitation under which he laboured, however, *betrayed itself* in the fact that in this instance this hitherto *unfailing marksman* missed his aim, disgraced a pedigree of *noted sportsmen*, and afforded a momentary triumph to *Abdoul, who was the first to bring down his bird.* The boy

now unhooded a beautiful white falcon which he held by the talons, displayed to it the first-fruits of his skill, then flung this new partner of the chase high into the air. The well-trained fowler fluttered a moment as if bewildered, then spread its wings and soared upward until only the keenest eye could follow its flight, and until the musical sound of the silver bells attached to its feet was gradually lost to the ear. Not long did it continue aloft. Its piercing vision had marked its prey, and now with lightning plunge it shot downwards from its airy point of observation, and swooped into the depths of the valley, from which the mist had by this time dispersed. An interval of considerable duration ensued, the expectant silence being only interrupted by the shrill peculiar whistle with which Abdoul gave his signals, and strove to recall the bird. At length the sudden flapping of wings proclaimed its faithful return, and the next moment it came floating up the side of the precipice, and laid a plump partridge at its master's feet. Its services were promptly repaid by caresses, by a jargon of compliments uttered in the vocabulary known only to the falconer and his hawk, and still more substantially by the panting bird being suffered to slake its thirst with the warm blood of its victim.

Meredith meanwhile had watched the successful chase and victory with half-absent interest, peering after the falcon with persevering steadiness, and admiring the perfections of its training. Perhaps there mingled with his satisfaction in this peculiarly oriental sport, a certain sense of relief at the excuse it afforded him for his personal indifference to taking part in the day's pastime. At all events, he suffered the rein to rest loosely on his horse's neck, and scarcely taking the trouble to reload his gun, abandoned the field of adventure to the boy and his favourite, and gave himself idly to observation of the chase.

Again, and yet again, the winged emissary was despatched on its unflinching errand. The game-bag was thus filling rapidly, but the exhausted falcon occasionally demanded rest, and at frequent intervals the cautious Abdoul replaced it

hood, and compelled it to repose against his breast, its talons firmly grasped in his small wiry hand. During these periods, Meredith, impatient of inaction, urged his horse over mountain and through valley, and ere now he had put several hours of travel between himself and El Fureidis. The road was one of those intricate bridle-paths known only to expert and adventurous rovers like Abdoul, and wholly unfamiliar to Meredith. It was with excited surprise, therefore, that, having towards midday gained a summit which commanded a wide prospect, he beheld bursting upon his view a stately palace of Moorish architecture, with slender pillars extending from roof to ceiling, and surrounded by numerous flat-roofed buildings, and long lines of light arcades.

The gigantic structure, with its attendant courts, completely covered and elevated platform, beyond which stretched a fertile valley funnelled through mountains, whose sides were festooned with the olive, the mulberry, and the vine, and whose distant opening disclosed the blue line of the Mediterranean sea.

Checking his horse, Meredith turned in amazement towards Abdoul, seeking enlightenment concerning this fantastic castle which had burst upon them as the palace of the genii dawns upon the traveller of the fairy tale.

"It is Eptedeen," responded Abdoul, his dark face lit up with a glow of pride as he thus introduced to Meredith the residence of the chief emir of Lebanon,* and the beautiful and picturesque country beyond. "The wide portal stands open night and day," continued the youth; "the Frank and the Arab are both sure of a welcome; shall we go thither to rest our horses and smoke a pipe beside the fountain of the inner court, beneath the pomegranate shade?"

Meredith hesitated; the distance was considerable, but the

* The author has here taken a slight liberty with facts: the court residence of the Druse emir of the Lebanon being now held at Muktarah, two hours distant from Eptedeen. The latter palace, which was the favourite residence of the famous Emir Beshir Shehâab, has suffered from the effects of time and abuse, and serves at present as a barrack for Turkish soldiery.

emir's palace was well worth visiting, and he had moreover an urgent motive for prolonging his excursion until nightfall. He therefore answered by an affirmative nod, and setting spurs to their horses they both plunged down the steep path leading into one of those ravines which here, as everywhere among the mountains, intercepted the approach to a spot apparently near at hand.

As the sure-footed steeds strained up the opposite side of the abyss, affording their riders a glimpse of the outer courts of the palace, it became evident that their arrival was well timed, that the occasion chanced to be a holiday, or court reception of the emir, and could not fail to furnish a fund of interest and novelty to the Englishman.

Congregated in the court-yard were representatives of all the mountain tribes, — Druses, Maronites, Greeks, Armenians, and Metudes, whose variegated costumes and characteristic attributes imparted a picturesque animation to the scene. Most of them had come thither on horseback, and long lines of Arabian horses, decked with gay and costly trappings, were secured to cords which were stretched for the purpose across opposite sides of the enclosure. Camels, lying down beside the fountain, or standing grouped together in corners, skilful youths exercising with the lance, servants and officials hastening hither and thither, all combined to give added effect to the strange and exciting scene.

The massive entrance gate was guarded by Arabs, armed with muskets and spears. They saluted the new comers, and gave the password to Abdoul, who as the frequent emissary of his tribe was no stranger at the palace. Meredith, now following his guide's example, alighted from his horse, which was immediately taken in charge by an Abyssinian slave, and accompanied the Arab boy within an outer suite of apartments, where he was left waiting until the arrival of so distinguished a guest had been suitably announced. Whatever *might be Abdoul's private sentiments, it was none the less pleasure and policy on his part to exalt the character and office of the man whom he served; and that this duty was f*

filled in no stinted degree, was made evident by the stately dignity of the embassy which soon appeared to conduct the Englishman to the presence of the emir.

After traversing a succession of marble-paved apartments, surrounded by richly-carpeted divans, Meredith gained a second court, decorated with fountains, shrubs, and flowers, passed through a light open arcade, and entered a saloon crowded with officers in waiting, and separated only by a heavy damask curtain from the elevated platform whereon the emir gave audience. As Meredith passed through this throng of richly clad courtiers, he gave a deprecating glance at his own faded hunting-suit; but no one present seemed conscious of the rudeness of his toilette, and all saluted him with graceful deference as he preceded them into the great man's presence.

The sheik Said Jimblatt was a handsome Druse Arab, somewhat advanced in years, with a light-gray beard, a clear eye, and a fresh complexion. He was clad in a long white robe, with a girdle of cashmere, and, seated at an angle of his crimson divan, presented a mild and dignified appearance. His reception of Meredith was cordial in the extreme; his return of the Englishman's polite obeisance was condescending, and immediately beckoning the unexpected guest to a seat by his side, he by means of his interpreter welcomed him to Eptedeen, inquired after his health, and proceeded to question him with eagerness concerning his country, his queen, and the politics of Europe.

There can scarcely be a nobler tribute to Great Britain than is contained in the fact that, even in remote and but partially civilized, lands, her representatives, whether in a public or private capacity, almost invariably receive that respect which is due to the sons of a nation renowned for its wealth, its moderation, and the protection which it affords to human rights and freedom. Thus Meredith forgot himself for a while in the patriotic glow with which he listened to the eulogy pronounced by the Lebanon chief upon his mother country. He responded to it equally sincere compliments

upon the good order, peace, and tranquillity which prevailed under the emir's government, and the conversation, which was prolonged for nearly an hour, was mutually satisfactory. The benevolent sheik urged upon his guest every species of hospitality, but pleading the necessary briefness of his visit, Meredith declined all save a cup of coffee and a pipe, served in the presence of the emir, and a hasty banquet which awaited the stranger in one of the lower courts after a final salutation, and a blessing on the part of his host.

A visit to the baths and stables, however, performed under the guidance of one of the officers of the household, consumed a considerable space of time, and it wanted but a few hours of sunset when Abdoul, who had meanwhile been entertained in another part of the castle, was once more summoned to his master's presence, and with but little further delay they set out on their return.

The road which they now pursued was more direct than that by which they had come thither, but seemed to Meredith more hopelessly impassable than any he had yet experienced. As the travellers were, even by the shortest route, several hours' distance from El Fureidis, and midday was long since past, there was no time to be lost in council or dialogue: with silent, patient caution the two horsemen guided and encouraged their steeds, which, refreshed like their masters by the hospitalities of Epteden, surmounted with admirable sure-footedness and skill the manifold difficulties of the way. Here the dry bed of a mountain stream afforded the only pass between perpendicular cliffs, and strewn as it was with shapeless masses of rock, it presented rather the appearance of a rampart than a road — there the steep ascent became so smooth and slippery that it was a marvel where the horses contrived to wedge their iron-pointed hoofs; and more than once the narrow defiles seemed eternally barred up by heavy boulders which had fallen directly across the bridlepath, and must be circumvented at imminent peril of life and limb.

But habit makes light of danger. Abdoul's white mare was a very mountain chamois, and Meredith was in a mood

encounter risk and hardship with stoical fortitude and indifference. Thus the journey was pursued for hours with uncomplaining perseverance, which was at length rewarded by an abrupt exit from the highland gorges into an open basin or valley lying between two spurs of the Lebanon, an oasis of verdure beyond which El Fureidis might be dimly discerned, suspended from an opposite declivity, and now accessible by a comparatively easy and rapid approach. The setting sun was casting long rays of purple light across the landscape as Meredith and his guide, suddenly freed from the intricacies of the mountain travel, by a simultaneous moment gave the rein to their horses, and commenced galloping across the little plain, preceded by the panting dogs which had been the unflagging companions of their excursion.

One more incident remained to complete the adventures of the day.

Not far from the entrance to the valley, where a light silvery cascade leaped from an overhanging rock, and filled to overflowing a natural basin below, a little group of gazelles were slaking their thirst before seeking their nightly refuge in the mountains. Half-hid as the shy creatures were by the glossy-leaved oleanders that grew around the fountain, Meredith and Abdoul might have failed to espy them; but the keen-scented dogs, having been kept in check during the morning, lest they should interfere with the sport of the falcon, were now on the alert, and quickly started their game. But the fairy-footed herd were not to be easily captured. With one bound they cleared the vicinity of their enemy. Before Meredith or Abdoul had observed them they were half-way across the plain, and beyond the reach of gun-shot. A moment more they would have gained a safe retreat among the rocks and cliffs at the opposite extremity of the valley. Pursuit seemed fruitless, for what foot can rival that of the *fleet gazelle*? But one more triumph was yet reserved for *Abdoul's winged hunter*. Quick as the lightning flash the boy *had unloosed the hawk and flung it aloft; with a wild, fierce scream it had shot obliquely upward like an arrow, and now*

at the critical moment when the frightened gazelles had all but gained their place of shelter, it pounced upon the chosen object of its prey, threw it to the ground, and flapped its heavy wings in the face of the struggling, panting creature at the same time whirling it round and round with savage velocity.

Meanwhile, the bewildered herû, thus assailed from an unexpected quarter, dispersed in frantic uncertainty and fear; flying madly into the pathway of the dogs, and heedless of bringing themselves within the range of the huntsmen's guns. A shot from Meredith caused instant death to one, another, wounded by Abdoul's bullet, bounded high into the air, then fell upon its knees a helpless victim. The Arab youth lingered to complete the work of destruction, but the Englishman, after taking aim and pulling the trigger of his musket, scarcely waited to observe the effect of his shot, but hurried to the spot where the struggle was still continued between the falcon and the prostrate gazelle.

For a moment he watched the conflict with the air of a connoisseur; then, his compassion aroused by the helplessness of the gentler animal, and the inequality of the contest, enlisted himself on the side of the feebler party, and strove to rescue it from the talons of the excited bird. His efforts were in vain, however; the hawk glared at him with threatening eyes, and refused to relax its hold. Abdoul was by this time within hail, and obedient to a loud call from his master hastened to the spot. Deaf and obstinate as the falcon had proved towards a stranger, at a single signal from the Arab it promptly relinquished its prey, suffered itself once more to be hood-winked, and meekly submitted to the treatment due rather to a captive than a conqueror.

At the same moment that Abdoul grasped the talons of the bird with his left hand, with his right he drew from his belt a sharp khangar, and prepared to strike the gazelle, but was checked by Meredith, who hastily threw back the youth's arm, and arrested the blow. Meredith's sympathies were now fully awakened in favour of the animal, which, released from the claws of its persecutor, lay stunned and apparently

less before him. Perhaps its likeness to Havilah's little attendant, which it closely resembled, had awakened his interest, for after placing his hand on its heart, and discovering that it yet beat, he was caressingly stroking its head, when it slowly opened its eyes, and fixed them upon him in tender pathetic appeals. There was no resisting those large eyes, so like Havilah's own, so perfect a counterpart of those which always maintained with her a complete though mute understanding. "Stay, boy," was Meredith's exclamation, as intercepting Abdoul's dagger he lifted the unresisting gazelle from the ground. "Put up your knife, and we will take the creature home and tame it," he added, at the same time mentally resolving to present it to Havilah, as a mate and companion for her favourite.

With dogged and unwilling obedience Abdoul replaced his poniard in its sheath, and looked on with secret anger and disdain, while Meredith proceeded to dress the wound of the animal, and the better to secure and protect it, tied around its limbs the long scarf which he wore in oriental fashion outside his hat. These operations completed, he handed his protégé over to Abdoul, with an imperative charge to carry it carefully in his arms to the village. The boy received his burden with a malignant scowl, which was quite unobserved by Meredith, who remounted the horse that had meanwhile been grazing beside him, and whistling to his dogs, rode rapidly off in advance of his attendant, who, with doubled fist and menacing gesture, looked after his master, and seemed to hesitate whether or not to follow him.

With that patient allegiance, however, which is with his race a habit superior to almost every impulse, he paused but a moment, then pursued closely on Meredith's track. That the burden which he carried awakened in him emotions directly the reverse of those which actuated Meredith, might be *gathered from the fact that he bestowed on it scarcely more care than on the slain of its species which hung from his horse's neck. It may even be doubted whether he did not editate a sly piece of treachery, for so loose and indifferent*

was his hold upon the animal, so heedlessly did he suffer its legs to slip from their bands, that had not Meredith turned at the right moment to make sure of the little creature's safety, it would inevitably have made its escape to its native mountains, or have perished of its wounds by the wayside.

Without a word of reproof, but with a glance so severe as to be an unmistakable reprimand, Meredith leaned from his horse, and relieved the boy of his unwelcome charge, which the Englishman once more wrapped in the mantle, folded to his bosom, and soothed during the remainder of the ride with tender and fostering care.

"Here, Bachmet," he shouted to M. Trefoil's Syrian servant, whom he met near the gateway of the villa: "you are a trustworthy lad; take care of this little creature — here is something to pay you for your trouble; it shall be doubled if your good nursing heals the poor thing's wound;" and as he spoke he placed a piece of money in the hand of the youth. The latter joyfully accepted the commission, and followed Meredith up the stone steps of the terrace, with exultant face and reiterated and eager thanks.

As Abdoul watched these proceedings, and the covetous eye of his race caught the gleam of the silver coin, his countenance for a moment betrayed signs of savage eagerness and disappointment; but a passion stronger than that of avarice immediately succeeded, if one might judge from the malignant scowl which as he turned away distorted his handsome face, and the muttered imprecations with which, as he led the horses to their stable, he invoked the curse of Allah on the hated Frank.

CHAPTER XIV.

A Night on the Mountain-Top.

THE dwelling of M. Trefoil at all times wore an air of quiet and repose, but there was this evening something painful, almost ominous, to Meredith in the perfect stillness and seclusion which pervaded the house and grounds, and which formed a striking contrast with the scenes and excitements of his day among the mountains. The fatigue of travel, and the rapid succession of incident, had somewhat subdued his mental restlessness, but as he passed through the little garden, whose silence was only broken by the rippling fountain, and entered the saloon allotted to his use, when only Bachmet attended to bid him welcome, he became the victim of a tumult of emotions quite at variance with the peacefulness of the place. Thus his manner was marked by a degree of haste, uncertainty, and indecision, wholly foreign to his usual habits. He entered upon the duties of his toilette with as much nervous rapidity as if hurrying to fulfil an appointment, but before they were completed seemed to forget or abandon his intentions, and assuming a Persian dressing-gown, threw himself into an arm-chair, a complete representative of gentlemanly leisure; he declined Bachmet's offer of refreshments, and expressed a preference for sitting in a room darkened by the shadows of nightfall; but the boy had scarcely left the apartment before the capricious Englishman sounded the silver whistle with which he was wont to summon a servant, called, a little impatiently it must be confessed, for coffee and lights, and as soon as the latter were brought, applied himself to overlooking a heap of English letters and papers which lay upon his table. He had scarcely had time to master any of their contents when Geita's voice was heard on a balcony outside the saloon, in familiar gossip with Bachmet. As if it had for the first time occurred to Meredith that his return might be reported to the household, and his

non-appearance wondered at, he hastily huddled his papers together, readjusted his dress, and with an air of settled determination proceeded courageously to the housetop, where the family, however scattered during the day, were almost sure to assemble at night-fall.

He found only M. Trefoil and M. Lapierre, who, seated upon the terraced roof, seemed to be engaged in slack and feeble dialogue. They greeted him as usual, or if the manner of M. Trefoil was slightly embarrassed, it was covered by the refined and benignant grace of the missionary, the serenity of whose deportment nothing could ruffle or disturb. The latter immediately instituted inquiries concerning Meredith's mountain exploits, the absence of Abdoul, the horses, and dogs having sufficiently indicated that their master was out on a hunting-excursion. Meredith gave a brief outline of his adventures, the prominent feature of which, — his visit to Eptedeen, at once afforded unlimited scope for conversation.

M. Trefoil interrogated his guest with many eager and flurried inquiries regarding the assemblage at the palace, and M. Lapierre, instigated by the manufacturer, furnished for Meredith's benefit a graphic sketch of the private life and political career of the Emir Beshir Shehâab, that powerful Druse prince who ruled the Lebanon for many years with impartial rigour, and whose memory will ever be associated with the beautiful palace at Eptedeen, which is a monument of his architectural taste.

It was half ludicrous, half painful to see with what nervous and awakened effort M. Trefoil laboured to maintain and foster an unbroken stream of talk, with what embarrassment he strove to fill up the pauses, with what visible trepidation he foresaw the probability of the old pastor leaving him alone with his guest. Twice M. Lapierre, whose simple habits sent him early to rest, rose to depart, but was detained by some earnest solicitation on the part of the host; and when the missionary had finally taken leave, the agitation of poor M. Trefoil became such as to rob him of all self-control. He launched abruptly on a variety of topics, but suddenly for

dered in all, for no avenue of thought or idea seemed open to him which did not lead him face to face with the truth he dreaded to tell, or bring him stumbling upon the verge of that disclosure which he weakly sought to postpone. After several blundering attempts, therefore, during which Meredith maintained an obstinate silence, the manufacturer relaxed his efforts at conversation, nervously removed his Turkish fez, and wiped his heated forehead with his handkerchief, peered into the crown of the red tarboosh, as if hoping it might reveal some clue to him, in his perplexity, and this last resort having failed clapped the cap upon his head again, and looked the very picture of despair.

Vexed and chagrined at his host's behaviour, but completely calmed in view of his overwhelming embarrassment, Meredith for a while maintained a proud composure, scorning to seek the communication which he felt ought to be volunteered, yet willing to afford M. Trefoil an opportunity for a candid explanation. As the latter took no advantage of the pause, however, Meredith at length rose, and briefly wished his friend good night.

"Going! so soon!" exclaimed M. Trefoil, speaking in a deprecating tone, but nevertheless starting to his feet with an alacrity which seemed to welcome the motion; "it is not late," he added, with a second protest, followed immediately by the counter phrase, "but I dare say you are fatigued."

Smiling a half-bitter, half-ironical smile, Meredith answered merely by a nod, and commenced descending the staircase, pursued closely by M. Trefoil, who, his tongue once more loosed, was profuse in hospitable entreaties and attentions.

"Nothing at all, my dear sir, — nothing at all, I thank you," was Meredith's reply to the various offers of refreshment and service with which M. Trefoil followed him to the *edge of the balcony*. "My wants are most bountifully supplied."

"*But stay,*" continued the manufacturer, catching his *guest by the sleeve* as he was about to descend the steps that

led to the garden, and thence to his own apartments in the opposite wing. "I forgot — what — eh!" — the kind-hearted man, who had begun with brave energy, here evidently abandoned his first intention, and faltered forth the commonplace, "what do you mean to do to-morrow?"

"I! do? O, nothing that I know of," responded Meredith, breaking away with petulant haste.

"O, indeed! nothing! Good night, then," said M. Trefoil, with an awkward, unsatisfied air, and turning to re-enter the house.

The young man ran down the steps, but was once more arrested by the same voice speaking in a tone half resolute, half tremulous. "Meredith, my dear fellow, one moment."

Meredith turned, and seeing that M. Trefoil awaited him, slowly mounted the steps again.

There was a world of meaning in the tender, emphatic manner with which the elder man laid his hand on the shoulder of the younger. The words that followed were scarcely more expressive, though coming as they did in that rapid utterance with which one speaks who has braced himself for the occasion. "About that matter we were talking of yesterday! I had it almost as much at heart as you did, you know that, but it won't do; we must say no more about it, so there's an end of the whole thing. It is a hard case, but we must bear it the best way we can."

There was no affectation in M. Trefoil's thus assuming that the disappointment was mutual and equal. He felt it to be so; the heaving of his broad chest proved that he did: the choking of his voice, the tears that filled his eyes, proclaimed how deeply the whole man was moved. He evidently looked to Meredith for a response, almost for sympathy; but there was no sound or movement to indicate that he whom he addressed had even heard him. The simple-hearted M. Trefoil was awed and grieved by this monumental silence more than he would have been by a sarcasm or a torrent of bitter words. *He even went so far in the earnest affectionateness of his nature, as to pass his stout arm around the neck of the in-*

El Fureidis.

movable young man, at the same time clasping in his one of the hands which hung listlessly down, and offered no returning pressure. Don't make too heavy of it, my dear fellow, now don't," he continued, in a consolatory tone. "We were mistaken, we men are so ignorant. I thought her little heart was wax, and I find it is a rock, that is all. I would have pleaded your cause myself, my boy, upon my word I would, but it would have been of no use: the child has made her own decision, and it seems there is no appeal from that, for the mother says so, and the mother knows."

The interjectional phrases, honestly intended to soothe their object, but each in reality carrying with it the sting of a barbed arrow, were uttered with spasmodic efforts, and with a sufficient interval between them to admit of some reply. But they called forth none. With fixed attitude, and eyes fastened rigidly on the face of M. Trefoil, Meredith's countenance and figure expressed merely the simple query, "Is this all? Have I heard the whole?"

Either the unsophisticated manufacturer so interpreted this air of dumb and stoical patience, or the agitation of his own feelings forbade further words, for he withdrew a step in the direction of the house, made an attempt to utter something out of the fulness of his heart, but failed, and darted within the doorway, half convulsed by the vain attempt to repress a sob.

"What will the Englishman do? Has he turned to stone? Will he stand there all night?" So M. Trefoil inwardly questioned himself, as having climbed an upper balcony he leaned cautiously over and played the spy upon a grief which he dared not otherwise face. "Poor lad!" he exclaimed, as he drew in his head after making a cautious observation. "Poor lad!" he again ejaculated, as a second survey revealed Meredith still standing in the same spot. Here the clumsy man, while zealously striving to be unheard, stumbled over *his own shadow*, grasping at the trellis-work of the balcony, *in order to save himself* from falling, and startled at the noise *he thus made*, retreated precipitately, saying to himself,

"He's got a stroke — a heart-stroke. God help him! They say there's no cross like a love cross, and I believe it."

An the man who, crossed in almost everything else, had never been crossed in love, hurried away to seek the customary relief to his anxieties in Ianthe's sympathy.

Meredith was not conscious of hearing any noise; he did not even ask himself the cause of the rustling of the vine-branches just above his head; he was not aware he listened to M. Trefoil's retreating footsteps. Those slight sounds must have played upon his senses, for it could have been nothing short of volition on his part which caused him to stand motionless as a statue until the last footfall had ceased to echo in the night stillness, and then to turn and depart like a sentinel dismissed from his post. It must have been his own act, though it seemed the effect of mechanism, as his tall figure swayed slowly round, like a heavy eastern door turning on its sunken pivot; it must have been obedience to an impulse, though it looked rather like resistance, as he dragged his limbs heavily down the stone steps, and crossed the garden with the weary air of one oppressed by a heavy weight. So, with the step of a paralytic, and the bent form of an old man, he descended one terrace after another, crossed the mulberry orchard, and gained the little foot bridge.

And now the powers that had been benumbed began to force themselves into play. The whole man had encountered the shock, but pride, the outer bulwark of the man, was the first to feel the sting. His veins throbbed, the blood mounted to his temples and tingled to his finger-ends. Despised! rejected! dismissed! the thought was intolerable. He must escape from the thought, and he quickened his pace: thus he crossed the bridge with nervous haste, and struck into the steep path which led upward to the Ayn el Bered. Rapidity of motion promised relief, but the thought pursued him, and he fled from the thought. With determined strides he commenced scaling the mountain-side, but the thought gained upon him, and he broke into a run. With a now vehement energy he sprang from rock to rock, defying obstacles. Tr

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moon had not yet risen, and the night was dark; loose stones rattled beneath his feet, and came tumbling down the slopes and crags. Sly jackals that were nearing the village under cover of the darkness fled at his approach; rushing water-courses strove to oppose his passage, but he hurried on. He paused a moment at Ayn el Bered — he stood on the very spot where Havilah had first burst upon him from the thicket. He heard again the merry laugh with which she had greeted his surprise. How sweetly it had rung in his ears ever since that day! but now it seemed to mock, to taunt him.

The mocking laugh, the maddening thought, how they chased and spurred him! how they fired his blood and lent wings to his flight, as leaving Ayn el Bered far behind him, he laboured up the dreary waste of pasture ground and peak beyond!

What cold horror would have crept over him at some soberer moment, could he have known how more than once his foot had slipped at a point where a measureless ravine gaped beneath, and destruction was the price of a false or careless step! What a sense of miraculous deliverance would have seized him had daylight revealed the rock-strewn or watery abyss across which he had leaped with an accuracy wholly accidental! But passion is self-engrossed; danger has no existence to a madman; and secret darkness never betrayed how death lay in wait for life that night.

Morning was dawning in the mountains, cold, early morning. The sun was yet far below the horizon, and only a gray watery moon shed light on the landscape. A chill mist crept up from the valleys, a chill mist dissolved from the clouds. The stunted herbage was saturated with moisture, the rocks were black and dripping. But older was the chill at the heart, heavier and clammier the dew on the forehead of the man, who, stretched flat on the mountain-top, lay with his face upturned to the sky. He had thrown himself down, hot, feverish, exhausted; but hours had passed since then, the searching night wind and the cold rain had penetrated every pore, and an icy hand seemed to have been laid

upon him. Passion and pride had spent themselves, the bolt had pierced beneath the surface, and the manly heart of Meredith had taken home the wound. The past was past, the future a blank — the present only a dull, cold sense of pain. Hopeless! desolate! bereaved! was the cry of the grieved spirit. It was no taunting word, no stinging sarcasm — it was not a thing to flee from, to struggle with, or to silence; it was the heart's own cry.

He had outrun his pride; solitude, cold, and darkness had dispelled his fever of mortification and surprise; but there was nothing in the leaden sky above, or the hard earth beneath him, to minister to his despair.

Now, for the first time, he understood himself; now he felt the strength of the chain which had bound him so long to El Fureidis; now in his bitter wretchedness and humiliation he could rightly measure the love he cherished for Havilah.

Simple M. Trefoil had laboured to soften the blow: he flattered himself, kind soul! that he had lessened its severity; but had he sought through his whole vocabulary of words, he could not have found any so effectual and so stunning to a lover as those he had irreverently ejaculated: "Her heart is like a rock." How the words rang through the young man's soul! How they seemed to reverberate through all nature! The hooting of the night-owl gave them harsh utterance, the winds whistling round the mountain-top caught them up, the huge cliffs re-echoed them. The soft pattering rain-drops — the cold gray moon, both whispered in his ear.

Her heart is like a rock! and the young man, wrapped in an apathy of despair, felt that on this rock the freight of all his rich hopes had foundered.

Despair has no rebellious workings; it has ceased to struggle. So he lay, stiff and motionless, with his hands clutching the thin rank grass, and his face upturned to the pitiless sky, unconscious of the fog which shrouded him forgetful that he could not lie there for ever.

Was it strange that this man's pride, the first thing to feel the blow, was the first to rally? Was it strange that he who alone with his grief had been insensible to the elements shrank from the eye of a clown? Yet so it was. The first faint streaks of dawn had scarcely crept up the eastern sky, when a Kurdish shepherd came climbing up the mountain-side, in search of his scattered flock. Wrapped in his soiled sheepskin capote, roughest specimen of the roughest race, this rude goat-herd might almost have been mistaken for some wild beast of the mountain, and it was with shy, brutish curiosity that, as he passed the spot where Meredith lay, he surveyed the figure of the prostrate stranger. His idiotic stare, however, had power to excite the Englishman's ire, and restore his self-control, and awaken that stern British pride which, rent as it had been, was still his last armour and defence. The inner citadel, it was true, was condemned, but he could yet patch up the outer defences, and present a fair front to the enemy.

With resentful impetuosity he raised himself on one elbow, fixed on the goat-herd an eye so full of sternness and of wrath, that the timid hind slunk away overawed, not even once venturing to look back. Meredith watched him with an angry frown until he had turned an angle in the pathway. As he disappeared from sight, the young man rose, looked round for his hat, became conscious that he had left the villa cloakless and bareheaded, glanced at his wet garments, ran his fingers through his damp hair, then folded his arms, and walked deliberately back to the village.

CHAPTER XV.

The Bedouin Lover.

HAD the Kurdish shepherd been called upon to identify the stranger whose desperate attitude and fierce demeanour had overawed him on the mountain-top, he would scarcely have recognized his man in the erect, self-possessed, well-dressed individual who presented himself that morning at Ianthe's breakfast-table. The boy Bachmet, on the other hand, as he stood behind his master's chair, would unhesitatingly have taken his oath that the party assembled round the board was in all respects the same that he had served for a month past, and even a more discriminating observer than Bachmet might have been blind to any change that had passed upon the household. But the simoom of the desert is not more effectual in withering up the face of nature, than the events of the last few days had been in blasting the happy relations that had hitherto subsisted in this domestic circle.

The frank, easy hospitality of M. Trefoil had given place to fitful loquacity and fidgety effort; the tender solicitude of Ianthe's manner, the liquid softness of her eye, as it turned on her guest, were indications of a sympathy which had far more power to mortify than to soothe. Meredith was rigidly calm. None could detect the reflection of outward circumstances or inward wrestlings on his face. Held firm by the embers of a determined will, he had put on his old mask of gentlemanly reserve, and sat like a knight with visor down, steeled against every thrust.

Neither, perhaps, among the four felt the embarrassment and the pain of the occasion so keenly as Havilah. She spoke not a word. It was all she could do to repress the tears which threatened to flow. She kept her eyes cast down, or if she raised them for an instant, it was to look about her with the timorous half-guilty glance of one who, conscious of innocence, still feels herself the cause of all the mischief.

Once only during the meal did she encounter the eye of Meredith, who sat opposite to her at the table. She had made sufficient pretence of eating, and had found occupation for some minutes past in breaking bits of bread into the leben, or curded milk, intended for Ayib's breakfast. This task completed, she gave a low, quick summons to her favourite, unobservant of the fact that the little animal had that instant laid its head on Meredith's outstretched hand, and was receiving his unconscious caress. The young man looked up, saw her purpose, withdrew his hand as suddenly as if it had been bitten, and motioned Ayib away. With a bound the household pet gained his mistress' side. But he was too late. Havilah thought she saw reproach in Meredith's quick glance, and abashed at the mere suspicion of a heartlessness which sought to rob him of the animal's affection, she had thrown her napkin hastily over the saucer of bread and milk, and now feigned abstraction.

Ayib hastened back to his former post, but Meredith was equally neglectful of him, and the affectionate creature, repulsed on both sides, and disappointed of his breakfast, was fain to wander underneath the table in search of crumbs.

It was a trifle, but it was a premonition of what might be anticipated in Havilah's future intercourse with the Englishman; blushing timidity and dread on the one side, close scrutiny and sensitive reserve on the other.

Henceforward, absence alone could lessen that barrier of mutual constraint which fate had placed between them, and on this first trying occasion it was a relief to all parties when Bachmet, returning from an excursion to the kitchen, entered the saloon, and whispered in Havilah's ear a courtly message, inviting her to an interview with a friend who awaited her in the garden.

That friend was Abdoul. Havilah had not met the boy *since his return from the desert*. He might have shared the *privilege of the meanest villager*, and waited on her steps at *any hour of her going abroad*; but such a proceeding would *have been inconsistent* with the dignity of which the youth

was so jealous. The formality of his visits was, moreover, but one expression of the young Oriental's reverence for his early playmate, whose presence he seldom sought unannounced.

It might be that escape from a painful restraint excited in Havilah an almost childish sense of freedom; it might be that Abdoul's wonted shyness was dispelled by the more than common cordiality of her welcome; or perhaps the familiar atmosphere of the garden, the scene of their early sports, had power to revive in all its simplicity the spontaneous friendship of childhood. Certain it is that the desert boy and the mountain girl had not met for many months with such reciprocal ease and pleasure as on the present occasion. It is true, the young chieftain's sense of decorum demanded the customary salutations; the *salâm aleikûm* (peace be unto you) was gravely uttered, and was met by the scriptural response from Havilah, *Allah mâkûm* (the Lord be with you). But when, seating herself beside the fountain, she questioned him with sisterly interest concerning his family and his travels, and he, stretched gracefully on the ground at her feet, gazed up at her with dove-like mildness, it would have been difficult for either to realize that six seasons had passed over their heads since the bronzed boy lay on that same spot, with his wounded arm extended on the marble pavement, and Havilah bent over him with pitying eye, and soothed his hours of pain.

The hard and strongly aspirated language of the Bedouin is ill fitted for the expression of gentle thoughts, and the face of even a beautiful Arab is most beautiful when in repose. Abdoul, however, was a poet by nature, and his versatile features were framed to express the extremes of fierceness and of pathos. Thus his words seemed to drop from honeyed lips, and his countenance wore an almost feminine expression, as drinking inspiration from Havilah's presence, he discoursed on the themes most congenial to the imaginative mind of the Oriental.

"See, Havilah," he exclaimed, as holding a richly-tint

geranium in a cup formed by one small hand, he gently stroked the velvet leaves with a thin taper finger of the other; "see how the sunshine and dew of Lebanon have painted themselves on the flower. Allah is great in the desert, but He is beautiful on the mountains. Truly, as father says, El Fureidis is the earth's oasis, and," he added, as he raised the blossom to his nostrils, "there is no smell like the smell of Lebanon."

"But the desert has its flowers," said Havilah; "and when Sheik Zanadeen encamps by the fountains of El Barada, the mignonette and lupin creep to the very door of his tent."

"Thou speakest truth, Havilah. They creep, and wither and die. The sirocco wind blasts them; the scorching sun dries up their fragrance. Only in the shelter of the mulberry groves beside the living streams of the rock, do the flowers bloom erect and fair, and the smiles of women make glad the heart of man."

"So faithless to thy race, Abdoul!" exclaimed Havilah, reproachfully. "Dost thou forget Zaaferan, the tall Palmyrene, daughter of thine uncle, Sheik Abou-Malek? Dost thou forget that she waits in her father's harem until her cousin Abdoul shall bring the bridal ransom?"

"Inshallah; then let her wait," responded Abdoul, in a contemptuous tone, and with a wild gesture of impatience. "Waste not your jasmine oil on a rat's head, is a part of the wisdom of the Arab. Zaaferan is tall like the palm, and slender as the thin reed, but can a shadow woo a lover? Can pale lips and tawny cheeks gladden the eyes which have gazed on one whose mouth is a branch of coral, and whose skin is a vessel of milk? The desert maid is the one-stringed Rubabah, which wearies the ear with its monotonous note; the mountain rose is a many-toned lute, and all the airs of heaven play on it."

Half shocked, half amused at the young chief's want of gallantry towards the Arab maids, and carelessly indifferent to the implied compliments to herself, which are so frequen

on oriental lips as to be well-nigh meaningless, Havilah replied with conscious irony, "Abdoul is eloquent in praise of the mountains: he will return no more to his father's tent: he will till a vineyard on the slopes of Barûk; he will yoke the oxen to the plough, and be a faithful subject to the Emir Said Jimblatt."

"Allah forbid!" exclaimed the young Bedouin, his eye kindling with proud disdain. "Beauty may flourish in the mountains, and sweetness lurk in the valleys, but glory, freedom, and power are abroad on the plains. Shall he who has subdued the wild mare of El Hejaz, and whose swift dromedary outruns the wind, handle the mean tools of a fellah, or tread in the footprints of the yoked steed? Shall the Arab el Araba, of the kingdom of Yemen, of the pure race of the Kahtanide, consent to become a slave?"

"Is not he a slave," questioned Havilah, "who day after day follows the toilsome caravan? Would not his straining eye and throbbing brow find relief in the green shade of the sycamore? Would not his thirsty lips be refreshed by such fruits as these?" and as she finished speaking, she held above the boy's head a rich cluster of grapes and a handful of golden apricots which she had selected from the basket of Bachmet, who was now busily engaged in stripping the young trees and vines that grew beside the fountain.

There was neither admiration nor wistfulness in the face of Abdoul as he gazed on the fruit, and it was with the proud air of one superior to every temptation of the appetite and the senses, that he gravely replied: "The traveller in the desert, Havilah, cares little for luxury and repose; to him hardship is enjoyment, and action rest. Mahommed, best-beloved of Allah, has promised Paradise at last to him who is victorious over pain; but the faithful followers of the Prophet look not for a heaven below."

Despite the inconsistencies of Abdoul's religious zeal Havilah well knew his capacity of patient endurance and sacrifice; she was touched by that profession of heroic

mission which might well have become a Christian, and with a shade of gentle pity on her face continued silent.

But pity was not the sentiment which Abdoul desired to inspire, and the expression of his face changing from resignation to enthusiasm, he resumed, "But think not that the desert is dreary, Havilah. To inhale its breezes is a joy; to bound over its sands is freedom; to hail the distant watch-fire is to feel the kindling hope. Zanadeen, prince of his tribe, rides at the head of five hundred spears; as many thousand do his bidding. To the friends of Zanadeen the wilderness is a safe highway, and under the shadow of his tent they will fear neither Turk nor robber. Would Havilah but journey thither; would she trust the hospitality of the white-bearded emir, the young men would vie with each other to do her honour; the maidens would sit at her feet, the desert would salute its queen."

Havilah smiled as the boy indulged these fanciful chimeras. It would seem that he drew encouragement from the smile, for, his imaginative ardour fully roused, he eagerly pursued the theme; his eye dilated, and his small hand waved emphatic gestures, as with the boastfulness peculiar to his race, he declaimed on the greatness and valour of his tribe, and the honours they had it in their power to bestow; not omitting to intersperse among his narratives a few vain allusions to his own feats of horsemanship and prowess, and the influence they had gained for him over the Bedouin hordes.

It was a picturesque scene which the centre terrace of the garden afforded at that crisis; so romantic, indeed, in its grouping and effect, as to rivet the momentary gaze of Meredith, who, descending the upper flight of steps, was compelled to pass within a few feet of the fountain, on his way from the breakfast saloon to his own apartment. Havilah, while lending an attentive ear to her companion's eager recital, was bending over a huge tray of fruit which Bachmet had deposited on the stone copings of the fountain; and her *vigilant fingers* were sorting and arranging the heavy clusters

of purple and gold. The hood of her white bernous had half fallen from her head, suffering the sunlight to ripple on her hair, and the snowy lambswool garment, of a breadth sufficient to envelop her whole person, was thrown in heavy folds over one shoulder, revealing the tight-fitting sleeve of her crimson jacket, and contrasting with her full skirt of gaily-striped Persian silk. She had placed herself just on the verge of the shade afforded by a little thicket of shrubbery; and her figure defined in the intense morning light, and relieved by a background of clear blue sky, formed the prominent object in the picture. The form of Abdoul was partially covered by his lowly posture, and by the branches of the oleander and orange trees, which arched above the spot where he lay; one slender limb was extended to its full length on the grass, the other bent beneath his body in an attitude conceivable only to the supple-jointed Arab; the fragment of an ancient stone entablature, which sometimes filled the office of a rustic seat, afforded support to the youth's left arm, and his chin rested on his hand as he gazed upward at Havilah; his face only was played on by the sunbeams that were now and then sifted through the foliage, and as his impulsive nature warmed, and called his features into play, the glow that overspread them seemed the more intense from the obscurity in which he otherwise lay hid.

A minor figure in the party assembled round the fountain might be seen in the form of Geita, who was, as usual, busy in the garden at this hour, and who, as she stooped to fill her watering-pot at the dripping basin, or passed from one to another of Ianthé's flowers, added not a little to the picturesque character of the scene. Nor was Bachmet a wholly insignificant object, for every now and then his gay red turban gleamed from the fruit trees and trellises, looking like some mammoth poppy which had attained a gigantic height. The Englishman neither started nor changed colour, but a twinge, as if the effect of sudden pain, shot across his countenance as he passed between this picture and the sunlight. Nor was his presence without its effect on the group: his pass-

had left a shadow deeper than the mere interrupting of the sunshine.

There was something in his slow step and dejected air before he became conscious that he was perceived; there was something afterwards in his silence and his passing on, which caused Havilah to shrink with nervous dread, and cast down her eyes like one rebuked. Geita dropped her watering-pot, sighed, and looked inquiringly at her mistress. Even Bachmet drew his head within the shelter of a tree, and from his secret post of observation watched his master's guest until he had entered his own apartment, and closed the door. Nor was Abdoul exempt from the shadow; it is true that as, without turning his head, he scanned the Englishman from a corner of his eye, and with the quick interpretation of a savage, read Meredith's face as if it had been an open book, the young Bedouin's countenance glowed with sudden triumph; but it was a fearful, a startling, a malignant triumph — it was the lightning that cometh out of the cloud.

His whole nature seemed illuminated; his eyes flashed vividly; his voice took an exultant tone; nor was the effect merely outward and momentary. His excitable mind was fired, and the new tone given to his thoughts immediately betrayed itself in his conversation and gestures. Flattering reminiscences of his own prowess and power were superseded by the stronger passions of his race, and either forgetful or unappreciative of the character of his listener, he now launched upon tales of war and blood, the provocation of the enemy, the pursuit, the combat, and the revenge.

His accent became deep, guttural, and harsh as, with rapid words and highly wrought figures of speech, he dwelt on these fierce topics; his brow was darkened by a heavy scowl as he showered imprecations on the foes of his race; his head was bent eagerly forward, and his eyes glowed with a *lurid light* as he seemed to strain his vision for the detection *of the distant camp-fire*; and when his wild tale reached its *climax*, his long white teeth were fiercely set, and his right *hand* *clutched the hilt* of his dagger, while he affirmed that

sooner or later, in spite of obstacles, the steel of the avenging Arab was sure to reach the victim's heart.

"Hush, Abdoul! hush!" exclaimed Havilah, in a commanding tone, starting up from her seat. "Cease from such wicked words," she added, with a shudder. "Hast thou forgotten that thou speakest to one whose religion is a religion of forgiveness, and its motto peace?"

The scowl melted from the forehead of the boy, his hand was slowly withdrawn from his weapon, and his eyes shone with a milder light as he meekly bowed himself before the rebuke expressed in Havilah's countenance and manner, no less than her sudden words. There was contrition even in his expression, and something of the mute pathos of ignorance rebuked. Havilah saw and comprehended it, for she resumed promptly, and in a gentle persuasive tone, "Leave such stories, Abdoul, for the cowardly and the mean; they do not belong to princes or to heroes. The noblest victim is he who can master himself: such tales of revenge and blood cannot be real and true; they are the legends of the old Arab poets — the fictions of the brain; they are not fit for Abdoul's lips or Havilah's ears."

With much patience Abdoul listened, his eyes fastened upon her face like one under the influence of a spell. Loth to suffer in her good opinion, he was glad to escape her displeasure under any pretence, and the pensive smile which had now superseded his fierce frown seemed to imply that his recent tempest of passion had been only feigned.

Havilah was but half deceived; his invectives and threats had been too unmistakably real. It was with a sad, therefore, rather than a satisfied tone, that she continued: "Abdoul wields his tongue after the same fashion as his sharp spear and dagger. He runs a wild tilt, and makes savage thrusts, but it is only to show his skill at the game; he only seeks to try the courage and to test the nerves. I thought he could not be in earnest. I would not believe he could so soon have forgotten all the gentle teachings of the mother Ianthe."

As Havilah finished speaking, she turned to leave the

garden, the grave unconscious dignity of her manner imparting to her something of the air of a youthful princess. Abdoul perceiving her intention, rose from the ground, and with the respectful air of a subject whose interview with royalty is ended, he saluted her with more than his customary formality, and stood with his eyes cast down, and his hand upon his heart until she had passed up the steps and re-entered the villa.

CHAPTER XVI.

Departure and Farewell.

It was now Meredith's first wish to leave El Fureidîs. He had seized the moment when Havilah had rose from the breakfast-table to broach the matter to M. Trefoil, and the preparations for departure were already in a state of forwardness. Despite his genuine hospitality, the transparent face of the manufacturer gave unmistakable evidence of the relief this decision afforded to his embarrassment; and it was with a ludicrous mixture of sadness and alacrity that he took upon himself the final offices of a host, and devoted all his bustling energies to the requisite arrangements for his guest's approaching journey.

With his usual impetuosity and contempt of obstacles, Meredith had resolved to set out that very day. But when he named his intention, M. Trefoil lifted his eyebrows, and fixed his round honest eyes on the young man, as if doubting his sanity; and Abdoul, upon being consulted, gravely pronounced the thing impossible. M. Trefoil knew the necessities of an eastern traveller, bound, as Meredith professed to be, on a distant pilgrimage, and the young Arab, despite the sly satisfaction which he felt at the prospect of the Englishman's bidding farewell to El Fureidîs, would not abate one iota of his preconceived notions regarding a due equipment for the journey.

Twenty-four hours was pronounced the least possible time

in which the essential preparations could be completed; and with true oriental want of punctuality, and some inevitable causes of delay, this period was finally lengthened to several days. During this interval Abdoul made himself busy in his own department, affecting the airs of a finished dragoman, and issuing lordly directions in reference to the shoeing of horses, the repairing of saddles, and the furnishing and replenishing of his own and his master's stock of fire-arms. M. Trefoil, meanwhile, deaf to all other claims, whether of business or of pleasure, might be seen at almost any hour of the day perambulating the village at a jog-trot, pausing at almost every cottage, and making drafts upon every quarter which could be rendered available for contributing to his friend's personal outfit, tent furniture, or travelling canteen.

The management of his affairs being thus assumed by a despotic servant and an indefatigable commissariat, Meredith would have found himself destitute of both employment and society but for M. Lapierre, who, as he had been the first to welcome the stranger to El Furcidis, and play towards him a paternal part, now seemed called to exercise a new ministry in his behalf. No amount of worldly tact or selfish policy, nothing but the truest Christian courtesy could have inspired the benevolent and successful zeal with which this village pastor, placing himself in the vacant social niche, continued to furnish occupation for Meredith's idle hours, and soothe the mind which was visibly preying on itself.

The very fact that the traveller's time was limited afforded a pretext for urging him to those scientific and antiquarian researches which were yet incomplete, and each day saw the young man and the patriarch sallying forth from the village on pretexts which each felt to be on his own ~~utter~~ ^{utter} also for-
nominal. Father Lapierre, however, had ~~far~~ ^{far} would finally be
tious wisdom to betray any suspicion of ~~ind~~ ^{ind}. But the clumsy
present relations with the family at the vil ~~part~~ ^{part} he had played in
of thought, the well-poised intellect of one ~~plasting~~ ^{plasting} the hopes of a
passion and the world, acted as a ~~levsied~~ ^{levsied} stupor with ~~while~~ ^{while}
mental powers; and the tender pity whi 10*

El Furcidis.

effort for his sake was exalted into admiring sympathy as the veteran warrior of the Cross, who loved a strong and invincible nature, saw with what equanimity of force the freshly-stricken sufferer sustained his burden.

For, although stoical and pitifully sad, there was something heroic and grand in the calmness and dignity with which, after the first shock, this disappointed lover took his misfortune to heart, hugged it there unresistingly, and without wincing suffered it to swallow up and absorb all those secret springs of joy which latterly had been to him a fountain of fresh life.

A practised courtier, a professed connoisseur in the ways of the human heart, would perhaps have moved an appeal from M. Trefoil's abrupt verdict, would have meditated new modes of approach, and still courted success. But Meredith was a stranger to coquetry in all its forms. He was earnest, simple, and true. To him a repulse was a defeat, the tilt with fortune was ended, and the discarded lover was a perpetual exile from his mistress' smiles.

Still less did it occur to him to question the manner in which his courtship had been concluded. The very terms in which his rejection had been couched forbade this. The decision had rested solely with Havilah. She was indifferent to him. It was enough. He asked no further explanation. He could even find it in his heart to be grateful to M. Trefoil, who had by his friendly intervention saved him from a more direct repulse. Some men's vanity festers, becomes inflated, and more offensive than ever when it has chanced to receive a sting. But it was not so with Meredith. So far as Havilah was concerned, the blow to the young man's self-esteem was fatal. He sought not to undervalue the prize which he had failed to win, but was content to believe that the unworthiness was all his own. He ceased to dwell on those bewitching *graces which had hitherto captivated him, and beholding her rather in that character of lofty and mysterious beauty which had sometimes placed her above his comprehension, he wonderingly asked himself how he had ever dared to aspire so*

high. So keenly conscious was he, indeed, of his own inferiority, that, if possible, he revered her the more for having been conscious of it too.

There was nothing mean or degrading in this self-abasement. It sprang from the noblest generosity, a generosity which had lavished a wealth of love where it met with no return, but which would not recall the gift — was ready to sacrifice its last affections, to let them flow out like water, but scorned to believe that they had been misplaced.

It is rare to find a man just towards those whose friendship has cost him dear. Meredith was more than just, he was magnanimous.

The childlike confidence of Havilah's manner towards him could not be restored, but she ceased to shrink or drop her eyelids in his presence when a single day's experience had proved that, though pricked to the heart by her avoidance, Meredith forbore to importune her with his presence, addressed to her only words of courtesy, and denied to himself even a stolen glance at her face, from the dread of disconcerting or giving her pain.

Nothing could be more distasteful to the self-love of the Englishman than the unsought and unwelcome pity constantly evinced in Ianthe's demeanour towards him; but his better feelings gained the mastery, gratitude triumphed over pride, and her touching solicitude was responded to by such filial tenderness of word and act as satisfied the sensitive invalid that not a particle of resentment rankled in his breast.

But to no one was Meredith's generosity so great a cause of satisfaction as to M. Trefoil. It never occurred to either (to their credit be it said) that their pecuniary relations would be in the slightest degree affected by the present embarrassment. The forgiving temper of the manufacturer also forbade him to doubt that a good understanding would finally be established between himself and his friend. But the clumsy tactician was conscious of the awkward part he had played in first blindly encouraging, then totally blasting the hopes of lover; he had been shocked at the palsied stupor with which

Meredith had learned his fate, and was fully prepared either to behold the young man the victim of despair, or to feel himself the subject of bitter and deserved reproach.

Relieved from both these apprehensions by Meredith's friendly and self-possessed demeanour, the elastic spirits of M. Trefoil at once recovered their tone; his penetration, which seldom probed beneath the surface, took no note of any effort on Meredith's part — he saw him calm, believed him cheerful, and, deceived by his apparent recovery from the blow, even went so far as to doubt whether it had been such a heart-stroke after all.

Outward acts of liberality are insignificant compared with generosity of soul, still they have their secret springs in the heart, and often carry with them a silent appeal. No one who had the slightest acquaintance with Meredith was surprised to learn that he had roused the gratitude of the village by the profuseness of his gifts at departure, and that, from the aged brotherhood of Maronite monks to the youngest child in the village school, none was left without a token of his good-will. These deeds of bounty were natural, and might have been anticipated. But a deeper chord was touched, and deeper memories stirred among the inmates of the villa, as many a trifling circumstance revealed, when it was too late for thanks, their recent guest's thoughtfulness for those whom he left behind, and his own utter self-abandonment. He took with him only what his bare necessities required; every article, whether of use or ornament, which he had imported into the villa, every curious relic, every costly trifle, his most elaborate fire-arms, his amber-mouthed pipes — all were found in their accustomed places. Not a book among the library brought thither from Beyrout was removed from its shelf, and costly furs and fabrics of Persian manufacture were found heaped together on the divan of his room. A beautiful *gray mare* which Havilah had occasionally ridden was left in *M. Trefoil's stable*; the *gaily-housed saddle and silver-mounted bridle* were still suspended from the wall. The *port-lie*, in which Meredith's pupil had sometimes practised

drawing, lay upon her stool in the open alcove, every pen and crayon freshly pointed for use.

Among all the contributions to comfort and enjoyment which had dated from the time of his arrival, nothing was less wanting but his own unwelcome self.

It was a cold and comfortless morning when Meredith bade adieu to El Fureidis. So chilly was the atmosphere, so keen the wind on the mountains, that Ianthe dared not follow her guest to the threshold, and he was summoned to an inner room to take leave of her.

The change in the season was making its mark on the invalid. She lay on her couch, wrapped in a long white robe, and her face wore the pallor of the grave. Moved by a sudden and yet solemn impulse, the tall Englishman bent forward and kissed her brow reverentially as one kisses the brow of the dead. It brought his eyes close to hers. He seemed to read her soul. "Farewell, madam," he said, deeply moved; "I shall see you no more; but my time, my wealth, my influence, are all at your command. I can never know any higher joy than in serving you. Only give me the opportunity, and I will gladly prove to you, whenever and wherever I may be, that the disappointed lover can yet be a friend."

"God bless you," said Ianthe, "and farewell. Few men," she added, in a broken voice, "could say and behave as generously as you have done, and do as you have done. Havilah's mother thanks you, and will not forget."

Havilah stood at the head of the upper flight of steps. She had witnessed Meredith's interview with her mother. Large tears stood in her eyes, and the hand which she offered in parting trembled visibly. Almost any other man than Meredith would have been emboldened by the poor child's agitation; but it was the reverse with the Englishman. He scarcely ventured to clasp the little fluttering hand, dropped it as if fearful his touch might offend, and with husky voice ejaculated the hasty word good-bye.

Even to the last moment the excited spirits of M. Treficund vent in the eager and officious zeal with which he

voted himself to every detail of the travelling accoutrement. Even at the last shaking of hands his restless eye was inspecting the leather strap of a saddle-bag; even when the party were fairly started he ran bare-headed down the bridlepath to suggest an alteration in the length of Meredith's stirrup; and it was not until the riders had fairly turned the angle of the granite boulder, and were lost to sight, that he drew out his handkerchief, wiped his ruddy face, and stifled a sigh with the philosophical soliloquy, — "Heydey! So we meet and part! A good fellow! A noble fellow! I shall miss him mightily! But such is life! And now to my day's work at the factory."

The travellers had scarcely proceeded; ten rods, when a low cry arrested Meredith's attention. He drew in his horse, and peering beneath the shadow of a little stone enclosure or shed, he beheld stretched upon the ground the nearly lifeless form of the wounded gazelle. The poor animal was in the agonies of death, and the cry which had reached Meredith's ear was its last low moan. The boy Bachmet stood beside it, watching its struggles.

Meredith had not thought of the little creature since 'the day when he brought it home in his arms; but he waited now a silent spectator of the scene, until after a few convulsive twitchings, it stretched itself out and lay stiff and still. The boy looked up with an expression of disappointment and regret in his face, which was succeeded by a glow of grateful surprise, as Meredith leaned from his horse and placed in his hand the silver which was to have been the reward of successful treatment, saying, in a voice full of mournful meaning, "It is not your fault, my boy; you have done the best you could; there are some wounds that never can be healed."

At the door of Father Lapierre's dwelling, Meredith *paused again*, and found the old man, staff in hand, at the *threshold, waiting to bestow a blessing upon him*. Springing *from his horse*, and leading him by the bridle, Meredith *walked beside the venerable priest*, who insisted upon *accompanying him to the farthest extremity of the village*, saying,

"I was the first to welcome you to El Fureidis, my son, I will be the last to bid you farewell."

But the village benefactor was not to be suffered thus peacefully to depart with the solitary blessing of the holy man upon his head. A peasant throng had assembled to do him honour; they already thronged his steps; they had mustered themselves into a band, they hailed him with music and with shouts of joy, and proceeding some distance on foot, when, after he had grasped Father Lapierre's hand, he received the missionary's final benediction, and had mounted his horse to depart, the air rang with the sala el kaer (be this a blessed day to ye travellers), which was the unanimous salutation of the crowd.

What a mockery it seemed to Meredith! What a mockery seemed to him all the hospitalities, honours, and joys, which he had experienced in El Fureidis! The little village had dawned upon him two months ago, had dawned upon him as an Eden of rest. Its united voice had followed him now with a triumphal song, but sick in body he had come thither to rest, but sick in heart he went empty and beggared away.

CHAPTER XVII.

The Ghost of Castle Shukif.

WINTER had come and gone upon the Lebanon. Though short, it had been unusually severe. Piercing winds had for some weeks prevailed, and the early and latter rains, which in the valleys were profuse and violent, had descended upon the highlands in the form of deep and drifting snows. The peasants of El Fureidis and other villages of similar altitude had encountered on their mountains all the privations and dangers of alpine life. Some had even perished of cold and exposure, and not a few had seen their camels or mules sink *inextricably in the snow, and leaving the poor animals to their fate, had made their way, frost-bitten, to the nearest place of shelter.* Nor were those who kept themselves carefr

housed exempt from a share in the suffering entailed by the inclemency of the season. A favoured climate makes men improvident, and in a region where summer ordinarily prevails for ten months of the year, houses are ill fitted to resist the cold, the supply of fuel is often insufficient, and at best the confinement within stone walls is sadly irksome to those accustomed to luxuriate amid soft breezes and beneath cloudless skies.

Never, therefore, was spring more gladly welcomed. With the first peeping forth of the buds children's faces peeped out from the half-open door-ways; soon young and old laughed to see with what giant strokes Nature was putting on her colours, and daisies, clover, and scarlet anemones laughed back from every sunny slope. The heart of the husbandman beat high with hope as he watched the watering of the ridges and the settling of the furrows, and marked how the paths of the Lord dropped fatness. Truly might it be said of sacred Lebanon, The little hills rejoice on every side, the pastures are clothed with flocks, the floods clap their hands, the valleys shout for joy, they also sing.

The spring is royal in her bounty, she is prodigal of her wealth. Not only does she renew the inhabited parts of the earth, but the solitary places are made glad at her coming, the lonely isles waft fragrance, the desert blossoms like the rose, and God smiles on the ruins and wrecks which man has long since forsaken.

So Esh Shukif, planted on a ridge of the Lebanon, huge rampart of Sidonian commerce, the Castle Belfort of a chivalrous age, the silent monitor of later times, rears itself as a monument of human decay, but is written all over with records of the perennial youth distilled upon it from an Almighty hand. No spy is now stationed at the loophole, but through chinks and apertures in the levelled masonry streams *the same sunshine* which once beat on the head of the *Phœnician guard* who watched the approach of the winding caravan; *no banner floats* on the tower, but its angles are defined *gainst that same blue sky* beneath which Raynald of Nor-

mandy unfurled his colours to the breeze. The Latin chape no longer resounds with anthems, masses, or tedeums, but the birds of heaven have built their nests in the groined ceiling, and the lonely arches re-echo their song; the spacious parade-ground is no longer gay with the splendours of Tyre, or the chivalry of France, but through the crevices of its disjointed stones vegetation has forced its way, and neither the march of men nor the trampling of hoofs disturbs the flowers which have made a garden of the spot. No barbarian horde, no Saracen troop, threaten to invade the empty fortress, but fifteen hundred feet below the verge of the parapet the foaming Litany rushes on with as wild a roar as when it formed the main defence of the castle, and sounded a warning to the foe.

What a strange old solitude it is! What a place for meditation and self-communing! a place where the earth-bound soul may dream and sigh and grow sad, a place where the uplifted heart must wonder and adore.

Spectres of the past are reputed to haunt such spots. Nor is Esh Shukif without its ghostly tenant, if we may believe the report now agitating the village of Arnun, whose superstitious peasantry have caught a fresh alarm concerning their grim neighbour. Seated upon the rocks beneath a spreading tree which is the trysting-spot of the little hamlet, the eager gossips detail their startling experiences. One had gone to look for his donkey, which had a habit of straying into the vaulted stables of the castle, but while scaling the difficult pathway, the poor fellow's progress had been arrested, and his senses bewildered by the sight of a gigantic figure, seated upon the abutment, and waving him back by a forbidding gesture. Another, lost at night, and seeking refuge in the fortress, had heard heavy footsteps pacing the stone threshold as if a sentry were stationed there. The children of a third had been checked in their sports amid the ruins, and sent terror-stricken home by the sighs and stifled groans which had reached their ears from some unknown source, and half at least of the inhabitants of the village were ready to testify that they had just at nig

fall observed a tall figure standing erect and still as a statue upon the round tower at the south-west corner of the castle.

Let the ignorant speculate and wonder. Let us follow the ghost, and see if we cannot detect in him a familiar object. There he is, just ascending to his nightly watch. The villagers have spoken the truth, for now he stands upon his post with folded arms, looking like the stony apex to a monumental column.

We saw him last mounting his horse and bidding farewell to El Fureidîs. Where has he been since then, and how comes he here?

He has been in search of the Lethean spring. He has come back more heavily laden than ever, with memories that will not sleep.

He has traced the Tigris and the Euphrates to their source. He has sought out the spot where humanity was cradled, but has failed to renew his youth; he has bathed in the sacred river of the Arabs, but its healing waters have had no power over his wounded spirit.*

In the disguise of a Mussulman he has performed the sacred pilgrimage. With a foreign garb and a foreign tongue he has imposed upon the sons of the faithful. He would gladly have disbelieved his own identity; but while others were unsuspectingly silent, an inward voice continually hailed him as "dog of an unbeliever." He has performed the seven perambulations around the sacred Kaaba, and has kissed the Paraolite stone, now black with the sins of mankind. The monotonous evolutions were simply symbolical of his own painful round of thought, the darkened stone was like the pendulum weight which time had hung upon his heart.

He has ascended the Nile, and wandered among the picturesque ruins of Philæ. Alone with the stupendous past he has striven to bury his individual lot amid the wrecks of a million

* *The Tigris and Euphrates take their source at the foot of Mount Ararat, where Eden is supposed to have existed. — Gen. ii. 14.
The Arabs have faith in the individual virtues of the Euphrates.*

lives, only to realize with keener pang that one living pain is mightier than a dead nation's woe.

And then, when he felt himself weary of wandering, when carrying his grief everywhere he became accustomed to the burden, when he looked the long future in the face, and saw no brighter prospect, this disappointed man began, as old men do, to live in the distant past. His manhood was a blighted, hopeless thing; but back in the past lay his childhood, a fair and sunny memory around which his tenderer thoughts might safely centre. It seemed to him that he could lie down and sleep peacefully beneath the grand old trees which had sheltered him after his boyish fatigues, he fancied that the days would be less long amid the familiar scenes where his school vacations had sped so quickly; he felt himself invigorated by the recollection of the sturdy independence with which his father exercised sway over his household and tenantry; he dreamed of the repose that dwelt in the blue eyes of his earliest playmate; eyes calm and undemonstrative, but sisterly and true.

Yes, he would go home. There at least he would be welcome. He would unite with his father in schemes of usefulness. He would put his hand in his sister's, he would make their fireside group complete, and they three would, in mutual respect and love, walk life's path together.

Who says that fortune's arrows do not twice hit the mark, that the lightning strikes but once in a single spot? History and experience both testify to the contrary, for blow follows blow in a nation's career, and human hearts seem ruptured only to pave the way for some fresh stroke.

Meredith had reached the sea-coast, and was about to embark, when he was checked — not by an earthquake — not by a storm, but by one of those missives from afar which have convulsed and shipwrecked many a life. Oh! who is there that carries not for ever on his heart one of those messengers of fate, with its "should have been," and its "in vain?" There was a sister's rebuke mingling with a sister's love in the opening clause of the letter which said, "Oh, Robert, you show

have been here to close our father's eyes!" there was the devotedness and the grief of a friend, no less than of a servant, in the words of the aged steward, who took up the pen where the dying girl had let it fall, and wrote with trembling hand on the self-same page, "Oh, master, dear young master, we did all we could to save Miss Flora, but it was in vain."

Both dead? yes, both. The old man fell a prey to a fierce distemper; the faithful daughter watched beside him to the last, took the disease, and then too died.

They have known little of grief who have never felt remorse. Bitterly did Meredith realize this as now for the first time in his life the torturing-iron of self-accusation entered into his soul, and gave a ten-fold edge to the pang of bereavement. Death had glorified the departed, but *their* death had revealed to him his true self in colours darkened by an imaginative and morbid mind.

The father, whose prosaic ideas had always been at war with his son's erratic tastes; the country gentleman, from whose tiresome social routine the heir of the estate had held himself obstinately aloof; the county justice, whom the young philosopher had pitied, as he beheld him year after year balancing the petty details of right and wrong, was remembered, now that the grave had covered him, as the injured but indulgent parent; the hospitable upholder of an ancient line; the cherished benefactor, over whose ashes the humble throng would shed many a grateful tear. The sister, who, moving in her little domestic sphere, had led a life seemingly so uneventful as scarcely to need a brother's sympathies, was imaged to him now as the serene soul who, for aught he knew, had maintained a greater struggle with herself than any he had been called on to endure; who, consecrating her youth to the happiness of home, had perhaps lived a heroine, who certainly had died a martyr.

And what was he who was now left the sole representative of their heritage and their good name? A renegade, and a traitor; a man who, deaf to the admonitions of conscience, had wounded the hearts that loved him, had forsaken the

holiest duties, had met the punishment that was his desert, and had been scourged at last into a recollection of Nature's claims, only to learn that it was too late, and that those claims must for ever remain unfulfilled.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Exile's Return.

It is easier for the generous and sensitive nature to endure grief than to be conscious of having entailed it upon others. Stoicism and philosophy may avail in the one case; in the other they are powerless. Meredith's spirit was far more crushed by the sense of the irreconcilable wrong he had done, than by the anguish he was called upon to suffer. It was not the contrition of the religious soul, but it was the natural humiliation of the proud heart, which has been outdone in filial love and manly self-sacrifice. It was not submission, but it resulted in a prostration of self, as utter and entire as that which has its source in Christian humility. It was not trust; it was helplessness.

Nor was his grief at Havilah's coldness any longer what it had been. Not that this grief had been banished by the influx of a fresh tide of misfortunes, but its character was essentially changed. He no longer rebelled against it as a cruel destiny. He accepted it rather as a penance. With a remorseful sense of his own ill-deserts, he could almost welcome his punishment, he knew that present pain could not retrieve the past, but he nevertheless accepted it with the instinctive hope that it might to some degree atone.

It was in this spirit that he wrapped himself in sorrow as in a mantle of sackcloth, and bowed his head to the strokes of fate as meekly as the monks of old bowed to receive their own self-torturing flagellations. It was in this spirit that he left the city of Sidon, where he had intended to set sail for England, and alone and on foot made his way to the solitary castle of Esh Shukif. It was in this spirit that he had wandered for

days among the ruins, startling the peasant by the fixedness of his attitude, affrighting the children by the long-drawn sighs that echoed through aisle and corridor, and exciting the wonder of the rude populace, who watched the afflicted man standing on the watch-tower with face uplifted as if in appeal to Heaven.

It would have been well for him if his appeal had been to Heaven. But it was not. Look at him now. His gaze wanders over earth, sea, and sky, like that of some lost wayfarer who has ascended to a lofty post of observation, in hopes to gain sight of the missing track. Whither shall he go? For that is indeed the question he is striving to settle. We congratulate ourselves that the world is wide, and boast of our individual independence, but few men are so insignificant or so free that their actions can continue long unquestioned; and our English exile is not yet so forsaken of his kind that he can be suffered to remain any longer in an old and ruinous castle, destitute of all the comforts of civilized life. The British consul at Sidon, whose guest he has recently been, has become anxious at his long absence. Abdoul, still in Meredith's service, and left in charge of his effects, has confessed to some suspicion of his intended pilgrimage to the fortress, and has been sent in search of him. The young Arab has followed skilfully on his master's route, has this very day arrived at the castle, bringing with him horses, sumpter mules, and other travelling paraphernalia. He has announced himself and his errand, has stalled the weary animals, and while waiting further orders has fallen asleep in one of the deserted stalls.

It only remains now for Meredith to decide upon his future course.

It is sunset, and Nature lies spread out before him like a gilded map. He turns round and faces the different points of the compass, but no beckoning hand is held out from any quarter. *The great mountains of the north seem to frown upon him, he can almost feel the hot sun of the south beating on his brow; on the east lies an untrodden desert; he fancies, as he bends a listening ear towards the west, that he can hear*

the sea whispering solemn dirges. Can either path be expected to lure the traveller?

The sun goes down. Gray twilight overspreads the landscape. Lost in gloomy apathy, the watchman on the tower gazes abstractly on a little cloud, the only spot on the otherwise cloudless blue. It floats on and on, as if like himself it were the sport of fate. It sails over his head, hovers a moment on the summit of Jebel Rihan, then skirts the snowy crest of Hermon, and at length pauses just above Lebanon, above the very spot where nestles the little village of El Fureidis. The sun has long been hid behind the horizon, and the trail of light which the great lamp of day left behind it has almost vanished; but the little cloud by some magnetic power gathers up and concentrates the scattered rays, glows awhile in rosy brightness, then melts into the ether and disappears.

The mind that is subdued and weakened by suffering is often guided by a shadow, and reads an omen in a cloud. Meredith had unconsciously watched the airy wreath of vapour, as if it were about to furnish an index to his uncertainties. His pulse almost ceased beating as he saw it settle over Lebanon. As it glowed in the red light it seemed to his exalted fancy like a finger of fire pointing downwards. As it faded away he fancied it a messenger whose errand was fulfilled.

Should he submit to its guidance? Should he follow where it led? Should he return to the spot of which he could not think without a pang? The profuse perspiration which started to his brow betrayed a momentary conflict. Had there been no such conflict the fiery hand might perhaps have beckoned to him in vain. But in the very pain that it cost him, his morbid mind saw a reason for obedience. It would be no joy to revisit the scene of his disappointment—it would be agony to witness Havilah in the experience of that innocent *happiness from which he was for ever shut out. To see her thus, himself unseen, and then depart alone, would be to drain the cup of bitterness to its dregs.* Go then, whispered the pers-

cuting spirit of self-reproach; and passively yielding to the imaginary mandate, Meredith resolved to perform unshrinkingly this further act of penance which destiny seemed to demand of him.

Was there something sophistical and false in this mental verdict? Was there all the while a more sweet whisper still which invited him to return to El Fureidis, a strange fascination which lured him thither in spite of anticipated pain? We may not tell. It is sufficient that if so he was himself deceived, and that never did devotee pledge himself to the performance of a sacred pilgrimage with more superstitious zeal than that with which Meredith vowed to lay this final act of self-sacrifice on the atoning altar.

Decision of purpose instilled into him new life. He descended from the tower, and crossed the court-yard in haste, as if fearing his resolution might fail him. His Arabian horse knew his master's step, and neighed, thus guiding him to the spot where Abdoul lay sleeping. "Wake, Abdoul," exclaimed Meredith, tapping the youth on the shoulder. "Secure your mules," and he pointed to one which had escaped from its tethering-ring. "Feed and groom the horses well. We have a three days' journey before us, for to-morrow we start for El Fureidis."

CHAPTER XIX.

The Burial.

It was at the close of a sultry April day that our travellers once more approached El Fureidis. Here and there a familiar object close to the bridle-path indicated their vicinity to the village, but no glimpse of church or hamlet cheered their gaze or encouraged their weary animals to speed, for every distant object was veiled beneath a thick cloud of mist. Their journey had been shorter than on the preceding days, and neither men nor horses had been exposed to any extraordinary fatigue. And yet the riders bent in their saddles, the tired steeds

stretched their necks, and at times almost refused to proceed; even the trees overhead and the flowers that lined the road hung their leaves listlessly, as if deprived of life and motion.

All nature drooped, for the sirocco was abroad, that blasting wind which brings with it a thick atmosphere, covers the sky with vapour, and saps the vitality alike of the animal and vegetable world. So noxious is the effect of this visitation, that one needs not to be the owner of a mulberry plantation or an olive orchard to dread its fatal influence. The husbandman and the vine-dresser may have most reason, indeed, to mourn over their blighted harvests, but during the prevalence of the sirocco the mental and physical depression consequent upon it is almost universal. Meredith required no such climatic agency to shroud his spirits in gloom; but its action upon his muscular system was palpable, and his whole frame was enervated, as if sickness were creeping over him, while Abdoul's eye lost its accustomed fire, and in unresisting feebleness he bent over his saddle bow until his head almost rested upon the neck of his mare.

The stillness too was oppressive. It would have been refreshing to catch some natural sound, something which might betoken a welcome. But all nature was silent. The Syrian peasant usually sings cheerily at his work; but not only was the ploughman's voice unheard, the plough itself seemed to be forsaken. Even when the travellers had gained the precincts of the village, and its cottages were glimmering through the haze, one might almost have believed that a deep sleep had fallen upon the place, the stillness was so unbroken. But all do not sleep, for hark! surely there is the sound of the bell; yes, the church-bell, and it is not the sabbath! Is it the density of the atmosphere which makes the sound so muffled? is it faintness of heart which makes it seem to the listener so hollow, funeral, and cold? No, it is the tolling bell, — and the convent bell tolls too, — and across the opposite valley comes the toll of some other sympathetic chime.

And what is that just glimmering through the fog, as
Et Fwedis.

gliding ghost-like around the tower of the church? How noiselessly it moves on, like some opaque mass borne along by the mist! how like a long dark wreath of smoke it winds up the curving pathway, and melts into the distance! It is difficult to distinguish any object in the dim procession, but now and then the fog lifts a little, and the floating body takes substance and form. What a contrast does it present to the bridal train which only a few months ago made the village gay with its music, its shouts, and its decorations glistening in the sunshine! Now one may see darkly, as through a cloud, figures that move slowly, keeping time to the tolling bell; here the hazy opening discloses a band of sturdy artisans, strong-limbed and firm, marching gravely in single file. A group of children follow, huddled together, clinging to each other's hands, and looking back over their shoulders they watch the approach of an old man, who, with bare head and snowy locks, precedes a company of rustic youths, moving in double line, and bending as if in their midst they bore a burden. A strongly-built man and a frail girl come next; he totters, but she moves like one who treads the clouds beneath her feet; he leans heavily on her arm, but she bears him bravely up; it is the weak supporting the strong. Sweeping robes and white veils mingle with the fog as the village matrons in their turn file past, the muslin folds that hang suspended from their tall tantours falling heavily, like the melancholy sails which in a calm at sea cling idly to the masts. Dark and sombre is the column that brings up the rear of this tragic procession. It consists of the Maronite friars, whose withered faces, black robes, and monkish cowls, no less than their dejected air, make them worthy representatives of the mournful scene in which they bear a part.

Seated upright in his saddle, at the point where he and Abdoul had made a simultaneous halt, Meredith gazed upon *this shadowy panorama* with the bewilderment of one in a *trance*, until, as the last figure in the train disappeared, leaving a blank behind it, the Englishman was roused by a *sharp cry*, succeeded by a deep guttural sob. He turned sud-

denly round just in time to catch sight of his Arab companion, from whom the outburst of distress had proceeded, and who at the same instant had slipped from his horse, and, indifferent to the fate of the beast, had darted away in the direction that the villagers had taken. The wailing cry of the boy, and his rapid flight, sent conviction to the otherwise doubtful mind of Meredith. Like one believing himself in a horrid dream and finding it a reality, he made haste to imitate the youth's example, and wrapped in the voluminous folds of a meshlak, and hidden by the fog, he in a few moments found himself one of the throng that were gathered around the grave of Ianthe.

"Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust," said the aged preacher, while the young men lowered the coffin. His voice, though subdued, was sonorous and clear. It filled the space around Ayn el Bered, near which Ianthe had asked to be laid; it could be heard by the outermost in the ring gathered about the freshly dug grave. But few realized the sense of the words, few watched the solemn act of the young men, for all eyes were turned in anxious pity on the master. As the first shovelful of earth fell with heavy sound, he started forward, exclaiming, in a tone of moaning and expostulation, "No, no; I cannot leave her here — tell them to stop. She cannot sleep in the cold ground."

He would have interrupted the labour, but a tender hand restrained him.

"Hush! dear, hush!" a persuasive voice at the same time whispered in his ear; "she will not sleep, she will wake in the beautiful heaven."

"I loved her! oh, how I loved her!" he murmured, "how can they take her away from me?" and he broke into a prolonged cry, much like that of an infant.

"Don't cry, father; don't cry," said Havilah in a beseeching tone, at the same time drawing him close to her. She had mounted a rough stone at the foot of the fountain, so that as she put her arm around his neck his head rested on her shoulder, and her mouth was close to his ear. "Remember

what she said to you," continued the encouraging voice, the service meanwhile going forward uninterrupted by the half-articulate dialogue between father and child, "Remember what she said — 'Bear it like a man, Augustine; bear it like a man, and the Lord will help you.'"

"Oh, she said many things," said the mourner in a piteous tone, "many things, and all her words were kind; but she will never speak to me again; why need they put her under the ground? she did not look as if she were dead;" and he once more endeavoured to break from Havilah's hold, and intercept what seemed to him their cruel work of burial.

"Don't leave me, dear," said Havilah, soothingly, and laying her cheek against his; "we will stand here together, and be very quiet, and listen to what the good father says. There, that is right; hark now! he is telling us of Jesus — the compassionate one — the comforter."

The poor man stood still and listened, but he heard only the sound of the falling clods, and his tempest of sorrow, lulled for an instant, burst forth again with renewed vehemence. Every moaning wave, however, broke upon her breast, her breath assuaged the storm, and now by the force of a loving word, now by the power of a will superior to his own, she contrived to hold his refractory spirit in check until the grave was filled and the service ended.

The young men took up the empty bier, and turned to depart. The crowd held back and hesitated, waiting for the bereaved husband and child to precede them; but M. Lapierre, who foresaw some difficulty in withdrawing M. Trefoil from the spot, made a sign to the villagers to move on in advance. They went as they came, the Maronite monks last. The convent group had been respectfully allotted the space close around the grave. Their knees shook, and their long beards were sprinkled with the tears that fell from their dimmed eyes, *as they perambulated the mound of earth, and sealed the ritual each with his muttered ave.* In this mountain seat of *religious freedom* none dreamed of expressing disapprobation *at their prayers, even by a look, as no sacrilegious hand had*

ventured to remove the rude cross, mutual emblem of faith, which the superior had dropped upon the coffin. The simple fathers came in charity, and would fain leave behind them a blessing.

M. Trefoil leaned forward with a stupefied air, and watched the motions of the retreating company. Havilah's countenance, meanwhile, was that of one who is invoking aid in view of some difficult task. "Come now," she said, gently, when all but the pastor of the flock had vanished down the pathway, "come," and she held out her hand to her father.

"Come where?" and he looked at her with a vacant eye.

"Home," she faltered; "see, they have all gone home."

"No, not all," he answered, in the tone of a grieved child; "*she* has not gone," and he pointed to the grave; "it will not be home without her; don't let us go there," he added, beseechingly, "let us stay here with her, Havilah — you, and I."

"She is not here, dear," said Havilah; "we can hardly see the grave now through the thick fog. We will go and sit in her room where her couch is. It will seem there as if we saw her, and heard her speak. I will sing you the evening song. Do you remember she used to say, 'Havilah will sing the evening song to *you*, Augustine, when *I* am gone?' I always sang it at sunset, you know. Come, or it will be too late."

He glanced at the western sky, put his hand trustingly in hers, but seemed unwilling to move from the spot. "Who will take care of her," he muttered, "if I leave her here alone? Will father Lapierre stay and watch beside her as he used to do?" and he anxiously scanned the face of the pastor, who approached with the view of aiding Havilah's persuasive efforts.

"She does not need him any more," said Havilah, in a confident tone. "She always wished that her body might sleep at *Ayn el Bered*, and her spirit is safe in the bosom of the Almighty father. We will come here again to-morrow, when perhaps the sun will be shining on the place — but we must go

home now; see, Father Lapierre is waiting for us, and good Father Lapierre is tired."

They led him away; now and then he looked back as if reluctant to proceed. Once he stopped, sat down on a step in the rocky pathway, and covered his face with his hands; but they were patient with him, and lured him gently on through the village, and beyond the mulberry orchard, to experience in his home the better desolation of those who have buried their dead out of their sight.

But the grave was not deserted yet. A tall figure wrapped in a cloak emerged from behind the clumsy masonry of the fountain, and he who had stood sentry for many a night at Castle Belfort, now paced up and down beside the newly made grave, like one set there to watch.

And when the darkness had become blackness, and the fog had shot close down upon the earth, and the Englishman had departed to seek shelter for the night, it seemed only as if he had been relieved at his post, for as his retreating footstep died away a lithe form darted from the thicket, and threw itself face downwards upon the damp grave, which it strove to embrace in its long arms. And thus, with turban drawn low over his head, and body stretched on the narrow bed of earth, the son of an Ishmaelite race mourned with frantic grief over the friend and comforter of his childhood, wearying the night with a shrill, pitiful cry, like that to which the camel of the desert gives utterance when its burden is greater than it can bear.

Meredith had journeyed to El Fureidis like one bent on a purpose. This purpose, however, had found its fulfilment in the moment of his arrival, for beyond this he had formed no plan even in his thought, leaving himself wholly to the direction of impulse, or, as he would perhaps have termed it, destiny.

Nor, trusting to guidance, did he find himself disappointed.

His best-conceived plan of action would doubtless have been frustrated by the unforeseen calamity which had plunged the neighbourhood into mourning; but in the circumstances attendant upon this event, a course had suggested itself less

open to objection than any that might otherwise have occurred to him. He would not have intruded upon his friends on any terms — much less in their hour of sorrow: he could not haunt the village as a spy; to betray his presence to the peasantry would be to expose himself at once to those hospitable solicitations which he was anxious to avoid; but as he reviewed the retreating band of mourners, his eye marked one who combined all the requisites he desired in a host, and he unhesitatingly resolved to follow the little company of Maronite friars, and seek to be installed as the guest of the convent superior. In the sacred retreat of the monastery he would find repose and privacy; morning might reveal the news of his return, but he should be beyond the reach of curiosity or comment. Abdoul even would be ignorant of his hiding-place, and here a recluse among recluses he might, himself unseen, overlook the village of El Fureidis, and from time to time gain tidings of his afflicted friends.

Had he known how impenetrable the fog would become at nightfall, he would have realized the importance of following close upon the footsteps of the brethren; but disregarding this obstacle to mountain travel, he lingered as we have seen at the grave, then made a wide circuit in order to avoid passing through the village, and when he finally turned into the pathway leading down the wady, the darkness and the mist were such that he could not distinguish a single step in advance. The path was familiar, however, for he had trod it many times since the day of his first excursion to the convent in the company of Havilah; and undismayed by the night and the fog, he pressed forward with a rapid step, and gained the foot of the ravine in safety. But here his progress was suddenly arrested. The little stream which Havilah had crossed dryshod, increased by the winter rains, and the thawing of the snow on the mountains, had swelled into a rapid and powerful stream many feet in depth, while the cascade above had become a heavy waterfall, which almost deafened Meredith with its roar. *It was impossible to cross the flood as formerly. Even had its depth been less considerable, the force of*

current would have swept one away, and Meredith was reluctantly compelled to abandon the attempt. He now bethought him of a small, stone, arched bridge, located higher up the stream, and following the noise of the rushing water, and making his way as well as he could through the tangled brushwood on the banks, he toiled on for more than an hour, and at length gained the desired point. As he placed his foot on the bridge he felt it totter beneath him; he drew back, and hesitated for a moment. He knew by the sound that the water, the surface of whose channel was ordinarily many feet beneath the spot where he stood, had risen to a height equal to that of the bridge. He could even hear the waves now and then dashing over the rough logs which were placed transversely across the arch, and constituted the flooring of the structure. It was an unpleasant crisis; but there seemed to Meredith no alternative, and he resolved to risk the passage. His first step reassured him. The wood-work, it was true, heaved with the pressure of the flood, but the supports were evidently firm, and unconscious of danger, he had nearly gained the opposite bank when he encountered an insidious pitfall, bringing down his foot at the point where a single log had been displaced, and carried down the stream. One leg was instantly immersed in the cold torrent, the other barely escaped being fractured by the shock, and the whole man was violently precipitated against the rock-lined shore. With some difficulty he recovered his footing, and clambered up the bank. At the same instant a severe twinge from wrist to shoulder convinced him of some serious injury to his right arm, which had received the full force of his fall.

Painfully now did he struggle forward. The water had splashed over his whole person, and drenched him to the skin; his hat had been carried down the stream, and the agony of his wounded limb became every moment more intense. The power of his will, however, was in no degree weakened. It *borrowed strength* rather from his physical sufferings. He *felt himself disabled*. He really longed for rest and shelter. *It was a satisfaction* to long for anything, and the motive

spurred him on. With his left arm he parted the thick shrubbery, the hair of his bare head now and then became entangled in the brushwood, his clothes were torn; but he retraced his course down the stream to the usual fording-place in safety, struck into the direct path to the convent, and at length caught sight of a light which glimmered within the court-yard, and, reflected in the fog, guided him in safety to the portal.

It was with difficulty that he gained admittance. Visitors at the monastery, unusual at all times, were unknown at this hour of the night, and it was only after repeated knockings that he made himself heard. Cautiously then was the entrance unbarred. Old Ambrose dared not present himself there alone, and when the gate at last vibrated slowly on its hinges, and disclosed a few inches of space, no less than three withered faces peered through the narrow aperture. The monks had prudently left a door of communication open between themselves and the other brethren, and the light from the inner court-yard fell full on the face of Meredith; but disguised as he was by his torn garments, the pallor of his complexion, his dishevelled hair, and the unnatural manner in which he was compelled to carry his bruised arm, they wholly failed to recognize him, and would have shut the door in his face, had he not made haste to reassure them by the words in which he craved their hospitality.

"The blessed lady Mary have compassion on us," cried father Ambrose, as his dull ear caught the Saxon accent; "it is the Englishman;" and immediately the gate was suffered to swing wide, six long hands were simultaneously extended for the guest's reception, and with a profusion of blessings and welcomes, the friars ushered the traveller within the portal.

Dreary as the old stone court-yard might look at noon on a summer's day it presented now to the wayfarer, who contrasted it only with the cold and darkness which he had left behind him, a cheering picture of warmth and comfort. A fire of logs blazed in the centre, and sent forth a ruddy glow upon the faces of the fraternity, whose benches were draw

in a circle around their primitive hearthstone, and who were leisurely smoking their pipes, engaged, meanwhile, in congenial intercourse. It is true their theme was a sad one, for they discoursed of Ianthe; but they had almost forgotten present sorrow in pleasing reminiscences of the past, and all had the attitude of men reposing after the fatigues of the day. They rose simultaneously as Ambrose announced their guest, and the superior, coming forward with alacrity, greeted Meredith as a father might greet a son returned from his wanderings.

"Have you a vacant cell, good father?" asked Meredith; "and a place in your fold for one who is astray upon the mountains?"

"The best that we have is yours, señor," responded the superior, promptly, at the same time heaping wood upon the fire as he observed the Englishman's shivering condition. "You have met with disaster; you have been in peril from the freshet; you have injured your arm," affirmed the superior, gravely, as his eye ran over Meredith's person; "we must undertake your cure; it is a part of our office."

"I place myself wholly in your hands," answered Meredith, "and will begin, as in duty bound, by confession."

He then related in a few words his adventures since leaving the village. The monks gathered round, peeping over each other's shoulders, and expressing commiseration, especially at the sight of the wounded arm which the superior bared upon the spot. As Meredith finished his tale, and stood silently looking on while the padre examined the sprain, and felt the already swollen and discoloured flesh, the convent brethren dispersed in different directions, each on the alert to perform such hospitable office as belonged to his peculiar department. One brought soothing herbs, and bruised them *under the direction of his chief*, another hastened to procure dry garments, a third uncorked a bottle of choice *vino d'oro*, a fourth prepared a simple meal of wheaten cakes, *dibs*, and lentils, and ere an hour had elapsed Meredith found

himself seated among the venerable circle, clad in the simple garb of their order, refreshed by convent fare, and, saving his youthful features and the arm that hung in a sling, scarcely distinguishable from the genuine members of the fraternity.

Less in awe of their visitor than formerly, and encouraged perhaps by his exterior conformity with themselves, the simple fathers even ventured to resume their discourse. The theme was still Ianthe. Each had some tale to tell of her kindness, her forethought, and the wonderful cures she had effected, and as Meredith listened to these memorial tales, the outpouring of grateful hearts, and called up similar reminiscences of his own, he almost believed himself one with these aged relics of humanity, the oil of whose life was nearly spent, who dwelt in the annals of the past, ignored all hopes of worldly advantage, and patiently awaited their end. He felt that such serenity would be cheaply purchased at the sacrifice of whatever earthly aspirations remained to him, and, for the time at least, was glad to feel the world shut out, and to dream a dream of contentment, sad, indeed, but sure.

CHAPTER XX.

The Alarm.

We have surprised the little Maronite community in the enjoyment of a leisure hour; but such was far from being the usual tenor of their lives. Daylight of the next morning found them scattered, and at labour in their different vocations, and when Meredith issued from his cell, the court-yard was deserted, and silence reigned throughout the monastery. The superior, it is true, had lingered to inspect and dress his guest's injured arm, and to serve the frugal breakfast which the humbler brethren had left ready in the refectory. *But these hospitable duties completed, the padre lost no time in setting forth to the farm lands below the convent, where*

aid was required in sowing the vegetable garden, which constituted the principal subsistence of the household.

Meredith, the only idler about the place, could no longer indulge the illusion which had linked him as an associate in the fraternal band. With his customary dress he had resumed his customary sense of isolation, and was at liberty to indulge in undisturbed reverie with no companions but his own sad thoughts.

These thoughts, however, if not less bitter, were somewhat diverted by sympathy in the affliction which had befallen the family of M. Trefoil; the pain in his arm, which had forbidden sleep at night, and could not be ignored by day, was a welcome antagonist to mental torturings; the unobtrusive and paternal guardianship of the friars was soothing to one who had been so long a wanderer, and his melancholy, though severe and settled, took a more placid tone.

He even found a vacant sort of contentment in watching the monks at their work. As day after day wore monotonously on, he came to feel a mechanical interest in the petty toils and economies of the community in which he lived. With absent-minded accuracy he counted the furrows which the ploughshare accomplished daily, the rows of beans which the superior planted, the number of mulberry trees which were sprouting in the orchard. The ringing of the refectory and vesper bells divided and marked the slow morning hours agreeably, and there was a satisfaction in seeing men and animals resting after their toils.

But all these things were subordinate to the more engrossing interest afforded by the vicinity of El Fureidis. The overseeing of the convent labours might well be an abstracted process, for beyond the mountain gorge lay the hamlet to which Meredith's imagination continually roved, and concerning which he indulged in endless speculations.

He could not catch a glimpse of the villa, for the budding mulberry orchard lay between, he could not see the stream factory people going to and from their work, for the call-

bell was now silent, and their tasks suspended. He could not even detect a familiar acquaintance among the peasantry, for the distance was too great for the recognizing of features, and in costume there was no variety. He believed he could not be mistaken in the form and dress of Havilah; but if so she never once came within the range of his vision.

Still she was there; it was her home; he was near to her; he was satisfied.

Was this, then, the penance he had prescribed for himself? So far Havilah was unhappy — she was motherless — and so the penance was annulled.

Sometimes his dreamy acquiescence in his present lot gave place to an intense longing for further tidings of his afflicted friends; but this yearning was as often counterbalanced by the dread of abandoning his present place of concealment. Under ordinary circumstances he could have obtained the desired information through one of the brethren who might have been intrusted on a secret mission of inquiry, but the fording-place was, as we have seen, impassable; the bridge by which Meredith crossed had been since swept away by the flood, the water was rushing down the gorge with increasing violence, and all communication between the convent and the village was suspended.

This latter circumstance, however, presenting as it did a natural barrier to Meredith's wishes, proved also an irresistible incentive to that resolute, defiant temperament of his which was always excited by obstacles. The roaring of the water in the gorge sounded to him like a perpetual challenge. It first excited him to meditation, then to resolve, and finally to action.

"The bridge must be repaired immediately," was his impulsive comment upon the report that the stone arch had, together with the logs, been swept away by the current.

"Impossible, señor, so long as the freshet continues," was the grave reply of the superior. "I have never seen the stream so high and strong. There is no knowing to what degree may yet rise, and nothing can resist its force."

"We will see," thought Meredith, and he immediately started off to inspect the spot.

His survey confirmed the superior's opinion. The abutments of the old bridge were dislodged, and the shelving banks afforded no facility for founding a new structure; but some other point on the stream might prove more available, and with increased determination to renew the broken link, Meredith followed up the abrupt windings of the current.

Even nature seems to lend herself in aid of a resolute will. At a sharp angle in the gorge an immense boulder had been swept from its rocky foundation, and precipitated into the current, where it rested firmly, forming a wedge between the intercepted waters, which were thus narrowed to such a degree that a couple of logs suspended from either bank, and supported by this central pier, would constitute a tolerable footbridge.

Meredith's sagacious eye at once recognized these advantages, and one moment sufficed him for the forming of his scheme, and preparing to put it in execution. He could personally be only a director in the work, for whether owing to the severity of his recent injury, or the ignorance of his medical practitioner, the suffering in his arm was almost intolerable, and now at the end of a week the limb was stiffened and useless. But he had plenty of that which will buy other men's strength, and the practicability of his plan being made evident to the superior, the latter willingly overlooked the claims of the convent farm in view of the Englishman's gold, and men and steers were at once drafted for his service. For two days Meredith's mind was engrossed in the hewing of the logs, dragging them to the banks, affixing them in the requisite position, and securing them at either extremity.

His purpose was at length accomplished: what then? Should he avail himself of the fruits of his zeal? His labour *finished*, and the means of returning at his command to the *village*, what was there to prevent his crossing, and paying a visit to the village? The opportunity was in itself a temptation. He surely had not built his bridge for nothing. He

could not go home and rest satisfied with this trifling success: moreover, it was nearly night; the moon was at the full, the sky clear; there would be light to guide him, and shadows to conceal. The impulse was altogether irresistible, and while the half-dozen comparatively able-bodied friars, who had been skilful and willing assistants in his work, gathered up their tools and returned to the convent, he cut a stout walking-stick from a straight-limbed tree, and set off in a contrary direction.

Never since M. Trefoil commenced his work of improvement had El Fureidis looked so lovely as on this night. Each terrace was a spring garden of vegetation. The rough walls that sustained the gigantic staircase of earth were overgrown with moss or festooned with vines. The white cottages, perched one above another, seemed to swing in the moonlight that came flickering through the trees. Roughly-constructed, but abundant fountains, were in full play, and foaming cascades were streaming over projecting cliffs, and finding channels for themselves in every hollow.

The noise of the busy, hurrying waterfalls would have disturbed a stranger, but their music was at this season familiar to the dwellers on the Lebanon, and had hushed them all to their early slumbers. It was scarcely nine o'clock in the evening, and yet Meredith found himself patrolling the village alone. There was but little fear that his solitary step would disturb the sound sleep of this hard-working population, still he trod the rocky pathway with the cautious, measured pace of one who fears to meet with some unwelcome interruption. His countenance, too, wore that expression of mysterious awe which creeps over one who finds himself a stranger in a place which is everywhere invested with familiar associations.

His thoughts were with the old man and his child. He was wondering — he had done little but wonder thus for many days — whether he still looked so crushed and broken, whether she was still sustaining a double burden, and wearing that face of strained but heroic fortitude. He longed to approach the villa; he felt as if its stone walls could not hide what he wa

so eager to know, as if there would be something in its very aspect which would whisper an answer to his heart.

Still there was something which held him back — a certain shrinking within himself, a certain sense of banishment and expulsion, which made the precincts of Havilah's home seem to him like forbidden ground.

So he went wandering round the village, perambulating the successive terraces, climbing up to Ayn el Bered, peering into the deep grotto just beneath the fallen peak, then descending to the foot of the valley, and meditating awhile outside the door of Father Lapierre's cottage. He met with no human obstacle; yet he was continually interrupted. One element in nature appeared to be running riot, and he encountered it at every step. Whichever way he turned, he found his passage opposed by some freshly-gushing spring, some intrusive water-spout, some overflowing conduit or fountain; it was impossible to escape a wet foot, so many little currents crossed the path, equally impossible to preserve a dry head, so many rocks and cottage roofs were dripping with moisture. The only rule seemed to be — water here, water there, water everywhere. One could almost believe that the white moonlight had melted into rain, and was flooding the earth.

Meredith could not be unobservant of the mimic deluge. Now and then a slight exclamation escaped him as his foot sank in some natural water-trough, nor, as he heard the earth gurgling at every pace, could he help asking himself whether, when the soil had drunk its fill, it might not be swallowed up in its turn, and the village swept down the mountain-side like lava.

"They know best, however," thought he, as he looked down upon a group of sleepers on one of the flat house-tops.

"Happy, tired fellows — mother nature soothes them with *dreams of beautiful harvests*, while she herself is busy *watering their gardens*. Why should I brood over them, like a *spirit of evil prognosticating mischief?*" — and he walked *away*.

He approached the bridge that connected the village with the factory grounds and dwelling of M. Trefoil. He was proceeding to cross it, when looking up the stream, he observed a circumstance which surprised him. Both the factory and the olive-mill a little lower down were dependent upon the force of a natural fall which leaped over a projecting cliff a few rods above the bridge, and which had its source in such an unfailing spring that it was seldom dry, even at mid-summer. Now, therefore, one might have expected to find it swollen into a cataract of sufficient volume to startle the ear by its roar. On the contrary, it was silent; the face of the cliff loomed gloomily up, unreached by the moonlight, which shone brightly elsewhere, and its bare surface blackened, not only by the depth of shadow, but by a scanty sprinkling of water, which made its way over the edge noiselessly, as if escaping from a leak.

"Strange," thought Meredith, "that when every other water-course is overflowing, this should be dry!" and diverted from his original purpose, he climbed the cliff, to discover some clue to the mystery. An explanation presented itself in the form of a clumsy wooden waste-gate, used for regulating the force of the fall, and shutting of the water at all times, except when required for manufacturing purposes. This barricade, always available for economy of power, had been called into constant use during the introduction of steam-engines into the factory of M. Trefoil; an operation which involved the necessity of having the mill-stream under control.

The last charge which M. Trefoil had given to his foreman, was to close the gate, and keep it shut until further orders. As, owing to the pressure of domestic calamity, the master's superintendence had since been wanting at the factory, his final direction continued in full force, and thus it happened that the stream was prevented from escaping through its natural channel.

"An excellent agent, no doubt," thought Meredith, as he observed how ineffectually the deep, pent-up waters chafed against their barrier; "but it seems a pity it should be put :
El Fureidis.

operation at a time when the superfluous floods are everywhere demanding vent."

This opinion was still further strengthened as he passed along the margin of a broad, deep reservoir, just above the dam of the fall, and observed the condition of the basin, which was formed partly by a natural hollow in the mountain-cliff, partly by clumsy barriers of masonry. At some points the reservoir was already overflowing and sending its waters in deep gullies down the mountain-side. At others its defences were evidently weak, and incapable of long resisting the unusual pressure caused by the freshet. Meredith had often shaken his wise English head as he observed the imperfect masonry which constituted the artificial portion of this barricade. He recollected having introduced his cane into wide interstices in its stone-work, having marked a spot where the ill-made bricks of which it was partially built had crumbled and mouldered away, and his having congratulated M. Trefoil that it never contained more than a foot of water, its lower foundations being all that were in any degree secure.

CHAPTER XXI.

The Catastrophe.

"**ARE** these people mad?" thought he, as he marked the huge body of water, and fancied that he saw the reservoir already yielding to the pressure. "They might as well make their bed on the ocean's edge when the tide was coming in, as go to sleep and leave this old murderous giant here, with his mouth open to devour them!" he mentally exclaimed, as stooping down to examine a well-remembered fracture in the stone-work, he found a steady stream gurgling from the spot, and drenching the ground at his feet.

He looked around him to calculate the consequences of the probable catastrophe. They seemed to him fearful, but he had a natural dread of attaching importance to risks which those more immediately concerned seemed to estimate but

lightly, and resolving to await some farther emergency before sharing his alarm with any one, he made a careful circuit of the reservoir and its immediate premises.

"It may stand through the night," said he to himself. "It would be a pity to arouse the villagers, for what could they do after all? If that wastegate could be opened now, it would drain the basin in less than an hour. If it were not for endangering the works at the factory, I should be tempted to lift it myself. How strange in M. Trefoil! How stupid in Asaad not to foresee this mischief!"

He had nearly retraced his steps to the edge of the cliff, over which he longed to see the water once more pouring, when he was startled by a harsh, rumbling sound, and a vibration of the earth beneath him. For a moment he became giddy, his feet tottered, and he was compelled to grasp at the first support which offered itself. Then, as the ground which had reeled and staggered like a drunken man stood still; he also recovered himself, and stood still too, but for an instant only. As if forced by an impulse or a sudden fear, he bounded forward like one rushing to a rescue. A passing glance at the feeble walls of the reservoir served to convince him that they still maintained their position in spite of the shock; then without bestowing a look in any other quarter to observe the effects of the earthquake, he diverged to the left of the stream, and made unhesitatingly for the villa. It was but to run a few rods, leap down a single terrace, and gain the housetop of M. Trefoil, the rear end of the roof so resting upon the hill-side as to render this the easiest approach from above. Even at this critical moment, Meredith had sufficient presence of mind to realize that he should but add to the alarm of the household if he made his appearance through the roof; so avoiding the staircase, he swung himself down by aid of the trellis-work which ran around the verandah, and thus alighted on the upper terrace of the garden.

He sprang up the steps more hastily than ever before, entered the saloon more precipitately. It was no time for hesitation or apologies. At the same moment, as if she

been running to greet him, Havilah came quickly from an inner room, and they met in the centre of the apartment. She held a lamp in her hand. Her white bernous draped her form, the hood of the cloak was drawn over her head, her face was very pale, in the dim light her figure looked shadowy and ghost-like. The recognition between herself and Meredith was instantaneous and mutual; but embarrassment had no place in the manner of either. Surprised Havilah well might be, for she had received no intimation that he was in the neighbourhood; but the question, "how came you here?" was but one among the many eager questions which shone in her eyes, and which were all expressed in the quick-breathed words, "what is it? tell me!"

She held out her hand, but it was in emphasis, rather than in welcome. He grasped it in his, but the grasp seemed merely intended to give weight to the hasty reply; "a land-shock; I fear another. The reservoir is giving way; the people are in danger, and the factories; your father, Havilah?"

"Oh, my poor father — he is in such trouble!"

"I know," said Meredith, "I know," — the first I know, a mere affirmation — the second, a volume of tender sympathy.

"I am afraid you cannot rouse him. Can I do anything?" she said, with a brave look on her face, which seemed to promise that she would do what she could.

"Yes, much — if you can only get his orders for me. Where is he?"

"Here," and she opened the door into the inner room — the winter room — which used to be Ianthe's. M. Trefoil was sitting on the couch where *she* used to sit; and looking straight before into vacancy. His elbows rested on his knees; his hands supported his chin. He betrayed no emotion whatever at sight of Meredith; but as the latter approached, and seeing his condition, stood looking at him with dumb pity, the widowed man moved his eyes slowly all around the room, as if seeking something, then fixed them on his late guest, and said, just above a whisper, "she's gone."

Meredith had no word to utter in reply. He stood appalled

in view of the present calamity, and almost forgot that other misfortune of which he was merely apprehensive.

"I loved her! I loved her!" continued poor M. Trefoil, speaking now to himself, and not even looking at the Englishman; "oh, how I loved her! and she's gone."

"Father," exclaimed Havilah, throwing herself on her knees before him, taking his hands, and holding them between her own, "do you see who has come? It is Mr. Meredith. Do you know what brings him here?"

"Is he looking for her?" was the mysteriously whispered reply. "Have you told him that she is not here?"

"He did not expect to see her. He came to look for you. He wants you to help him. We all want you. There is trouble at the factory; they need the master. Let us go," and she rose herself, pointed to the door, and made a hasty movement in that direction, striving to entice him by her example as one would entice a child.

"Trouble! What sort of trouble? is anybody dead?"

"No; I hope not dead, but in danger. Perhaps we can save them. Oh, think of them, think of the poor people, my mother's poor;" and she laid her hand upon his shoulder, and looked him beseechingly in the face.

He answered her look by a melancholy stare, then dropped his head upon his hands, and broke forth in the piteous cry, "Poor people! Oh, yes, we are all poor people! she took care of us all. There is nobody to take care of us now. No matter what happens now — no matter — no matter;" and he continued to whimper forth the last words until they subsided into an indistinct muttering.

His form was bowed down, his face almost resting on his knees, his whole attitude expressive of utter indifference to future fate and fortune. Havilah glanced from him to Meredith, and shook her head despairingly. "It is of no use," she signified by an inarticulate motion of her lips.

"*Has he been so ever since?*" whispered Meredith, leaving his question unfinished, for he saw that Havilah understood his meaning.

She nodded mournfully in the affirmative, and pointing towards her father, indicated by a gesture her desire that Meredith should himself undertake to rouse him from his stupor of grief.

The young man cleared his voice, went forward and exclaimed, with forced alacrity, "M. Trefoil, my friend, my dear friend, do you know me? haven't you a word of welcome for a traveller?"

The tone and question, striking fresh and clear upon the torpid senses of M. Trefoil, imparted to them momentary life and vigour. An intelligent look overspread his features, memory asserted her power; he suffered Meredith to grasp his hand, and slowly rising from his chair was about to address to him some coherent and earnest inquiry, when suddenly the floor reeled like a ship in a heavy sea, there was a rumbling sound like distant thunder, succeeded by the crash of falling stones, the frightened cry of startled cattle, and the sudden whistling of the night wind. The old man tottered, looked around him like one bewildered, then fell back into his chair, where he was at once encircled by the arms of his daughter, who, precipitated in that direction, flung herself involuntarily upon her father's neck. Meredith, thrown completely off his balance, was hurled violently against the wall, and recovered himself only to find his position reversed, and to stagger again into the centre of the apartment as a second undulation of the earth caused the floor once more to vibrate. There was an awful pause, a solemn stillness, all held their breath and listened; but the distant sounds died away, slighter pulsations agitated the room at intervals of some seconds, unaccompanied, however, by *distinctive* noises, and at length the suspended breath came freer, and each of the three occupants of the apartment looked around as if seeking to read in each other's faces some confirmation of the belief that the shock *had for the present subsided.*

"*There is no time to be lost!*" cried Meredith, as the conviction of present safety and future insecurity rushed simultaneously to his mind. "*There may not be another shock,*"

he added, addressing himself to Havilah, "but the terrace walls are all undermined by the flood, the very hill-side may be washed away. We must not remain here a moment!"

Havilah looked anxiously at her father, whose eyes were wandering inquiringly from the face of his child to that of the Englishman.

"Where can we take him?" she asked hastily of Meredith.

"There is no danger on the mountain-top, if he had strength to climb," said Meredith, "or in the valley there are plenty of protected spots. M. Lapierre's cottage!" he exclaimed, as by a sudden impulse of thought; "that is the place of all others — it is cut in the very mountain-side — nothing can shake it from its foundations. Once there, you and he are safe. But let us be gone;" and suiting the action to the word, he drew M. Trefoil's arm determinedly within his and started towards the door.

Havilah caught up a cloak, threw it over her father, and followed.

"Havilah!" whimpered he, looking back over his shoulder with a fearful shuddering expression. "Havilah!"

"Yes, dear, I am coming too," she replied, making haste to overtake and support him on the side opposite to Meredith.

"Where are we going? where?" asked M. Trefoil, wildly; but suffering himself to be led across the threshold.

"To Father Lapierre's cottage; that is a safe place, you know; my mother bade us go to him for safety always."

"So she did! so she did!" said the old man, in a tone of ready assent; and memory thus furnishing an impetus in the way he was going, he shuffled clumsily and weakly, but willingly along.

Not only M. Trefoil's household, but the entire village was by this time aroused. The murmur of voices could be distinguished at a distance, and the excitement and alarm were becoming universal. In the very beginning of their progress the fugitives from the villa were arrested by evidences of terror and destruction. The steps which led from the first to the

second terrace were fallen into a ruinous heap; in the garden below, the servants of the family were huddled together. They hailed their master and young mistress with loud cries, exclaiming with joy at their safety, but mingling congratulations with wailing laments at present disaster and future danger.

"Here, Bachmet, lend your hand to help my father," cried Havilah, as she with her companions clambered with difficulty down the terrace; "hush, Geita! you must not alarm your master," she whispered in an under tone to the girl who was attracting her mistress's attention to a corner of the western wing of the villa, which had fallen in. "Are you all safe, good Abou?" she inquired of a faithful old Syrian cook and steward; and when the old man had responded, "all!" she added, "thank God! follow us then, but be quiet."

They obeyed her in loving reverence, the spirit of awe not a little augmented among the group by the sudden and, as it seemed to them, supernatural appearance of the Englishman upon the scene.

Thus far the disasters of the night seemed to be confined to the villa and its environs, which, built upon broader and less substantial terraces than those of the ancient village, were consequently more susceptible to accident, both by flood and earthquake. Beyond the precincts of the garden all wore its customary appearance, save where a sinking or sliding wall denoted the precarious nature of the foundations on which life and property depended.

"That reservoir holds yet; miraculous!" was the unguarded exclamation of Meredith, as crossing the bridge below the cliff, he looked up and beheld the bare rock frowning above. "There may still be time," he murmured half aloud, and hurrying M. Trefoil on at redoubled speed.

Havilah's eye followed Meredith's. So did her mind. She *knew the nature of the catastrophe* which he apprehended; *her quick instinct* taught her the only remedy.

"*God be praised!* you are safe from harm," gasped Meredith, *as he pushed open the door of Father Lapierre's her-*

mitage; his broad chest heaving, not from the physical efforts he had made, but from the deep emotions of thankfulness with which he ushered the helpless old man and his child into their place of refuge.

"Now I must find Asaad," he added in an undertone to Havilah, as she passed him on the threshold. "Does he still occupy the cottage below the mulberry orchard?" He waited but an answering nod in reply, and was gone.

The cottage was empty. The shepherd was not likely to be asleep at his post when danger awaited his flock. The atmosphere was comfortable, however. There was a fire smouldering on the earth, the iron lamp was trimmed, and burning in its niche; it was evident that the place had been but recently forsaken. M. Trefoil looked from floor to ceiling, glanced curiously at various objects as if they excited in his mind some dim association with the past; then relapsing into the half-bewildered stupor which had become habitual to him, he sank upon a corner of the divan, suffered his head to drop upon his hands, and resumed his vacant, indifferent expression of countenance.

Havilah bestowed on him a look of tender pity. In his very immobility, nevertheless, she found encouragement and assurance for the present emergency. She drew his cloak closely about him, and imprinted a hasty kiss on his passive features. Little Geita stood meanwhile looking on, and Ayib, who had followed close upon his mistress's track, had nestled in what was now his customary place at her father's feet. "Sit here, Geita," signified Havilah to the Turkish girl, pointing to a seat on the divan. "Do not stir from his side. Good Abou, you will guard the door. Until I come back, whenever that may be, remember, Abou, you must take care of my father." She pressed her slight figure against the door; it turned on its pivot, and she slid out into the moonlight.

CHAPTER XXII.

Ben Hadad, the Jew.

EL FUREIDIS was now a scene of confusion and dismay. An indistinct murmur of fear and lamentation went up from the mountain-side; there was no huddling together in crowds, no universal watchword of alarm, no crying upon one another for help. Each peasant was engaged, heart and hand, for the salvation of his own little household and domain. The earthquake had subsided; the moonlight shone in mockery, and still the work of destruction went on. The great law of cohesion seemed to have been subverted, and matter to have been suddenly set adrift. Here a clay roof had parted at one extremity, and a stream of mud and water was pouring in; there a terrace wall had fallen; gardens of vegetation had been driven down the slope, and even heaped in the form of rubbish upon the lower court-yards and house-tops. In one or two instances stone dwellings had been precipitated upon those below, and the occupants had barely escaped with their lives. For the most part, the loose soil only was swept from its place, and the houses stood firm upon their foundations; but the undermining process was going on insidiously, and the unhappy villagers were distracted between the contending claims of person and property; all knowing that life and limb were at stake; none willing to sacrifice the chance of still propping up their roofs and walls, and securing some portion at least of their worldly goods.

"Each man for himself," was the necessary motto where all were victims of a common disaster. It was an exception to the general rule then, that two individuals should be seen at this crisis hastening in one direction. The taller and *manlier* of the two ran at full speed, now and then looking *back*, and in *breathless* tones uttering some word to the other, *who followed with a rapidity which sprang from respect to authority, rather than any voluntary impulse.*

"I tell you, Asaad," exclaimed the former, "your master is incapable of giving any orders. You are a man of reason, are you not?"

"I trust so, Howadji, for it is reason which tells me that to open the sluice-ways is to let the lion in upon the prey. I cannot expose my master's property."

"And so you will suffer the water to run mad? You will see the village swept to destruction rather than take a bold step to save it? What a dastard you are, man! I tell you the blood of these people will be on your head."

"But the factory! the factory!" persisted Asaad, stopping short, and wringing his hands, for he saw determination in the Englishman's face, and fear and irresolution were contending in his soul; "we all depend on the factory for our daily bread."

"Depend on the factory! pshaw!" cried Meredith, angrily; "every one depends on himself — or ought to; besides, dead men eat no bread; and on my soul I believe there is but one chance for life here to-night. Be a man, Asaad, and do the work of a man; for, by heaven —" He stopped short, foot and tongue at the same instant arrested, eye and ear strained, and his heart spell-bound; "by heaven," he added, after an instant's pause, and speaking now in a tone of mingled horror, triumph, and reproach, "a woman has done it for you."

As soldiers rushing to a conflict would feel themselves impotent and overawed, should they behold an angel fighting in the van of their army, so these two men stood trembling and aghast at the scene which presented itself to their upturned gaze. Like a wild beast loosened from long confinement, the unchained waters were dashing over the fall, and hurrying down the channel, while, upright amid the rush, the roar, and the spray, stood one clothed all in white, who might have been deemed a vaporous water spirit, sent thither to allay the flood. Her garments were fluttering over the verge of the fall; her foot seemed to rest on the gliding torrent; her form was showered by the foam. The golden moonlight glorified

her; imagination lent her wings; yet she was a mortal thing, endued with immortal powers only, as matter yields to mind when the spirit is in the ascendant.

Her slight arm might otherwise have sought in vain to stir the massive bar, and to raise the ponderous lever; but God and a great motive gave her strength, and she had done the work of a man and a deliverer.

It was a moment of awful and intense excitement; she had opened the only safety-valve; danger was finding vent through its natural channel, yet the relief was but partial and gradual, the crisis pressing and imminent.

Havilah stood for a moment watching the result of her resolute and courageous act. "It is pouring out fast," was her triumphant thought as she saw the tide rush beneath her feet. "Will it prove a salvation? God knows!" and she lifted her face upward in devout appeal; then becoming conscious of her own perilous position, she turned slowly round to retrace her steps to the bank of the watercourse. It required a steady eye and foot to tread the narrow beam which was the connecting link between herself and the margin of the stream. She had stepped out upon the solitary timber without a shudder when hastening to lift the bolt at the extremity just above the fall; but the pent-up waters were comparatively quiet then, now the beam was resting above the surface of a tumultuous flood, and the bewildering roar caused her heart to quail a little, as putting one foot carefully before the other, she swayed her light form, and endeavoured to preserve her balance.

The first step gave her confidence, however; she looked away from the fall, kept her eye on the shore, and in a moment more would have set foot on the bank, when suddenly the stone abutment to which the beam was riveted, and which had been already insidiously undermined, gave way beneath *the pressure of the flood*; rocks, earth, and masonry were *upheaved*; the pier tottered, reeled, then shivered into fragments, and the sure end of Havilah's frail support was left at *the mercy of the current*. As the iron clamps which had been

affixed to the masonry parted with a shock, the extremity of the beam tilted up and rocked so fearfully that the figure of its dizzy occupant was swayed to and fro like a willow-twig tossed in the breeze; still she maintained her footing: in the very centre of the timber she might even have made a few light bounds, and sprang from the raised end to the shore; but before she could poise herself for the effort, or discern a secure resting-place amid the wreck that strewed the bank, the beam touched the surface of the torrent, and whirled by the force of the rushing tide, was drifted out at such an angle as to bring its extremity to the very verge of the fall, and place a fearful abyss between Havilah and the shore. The opposite extremity had hitherto been riveted to the wastegate, but the violent impetus which swept the timber into its oblique position across the current had the effect of instantly wrenching it from its remaining fastenings, thus setting the frail bark with its solitary voyager at the mercy of the cruel element. Destruction seemed gaping for its prey; but there was yet one more obstacle to the timber's fatal leap, in the shape of a jutting point of rock, which, rearing itself in the rapids just above the fall, caught the beam in its progress, and held it up for an instant suspended at right angles with the stream.

It was but a momentary salvation, a mere balancing between life and the grave. Havilah stood erect, scarce conscious of her awful peril, but with a figure stiffened into rigidity by the instinctive impulse to resist the force which thus far had carried her helpless along. There seemed not a possible chance for her rescue, but love, that is stronger than death, was ready to challenge fate, and the critical moment had come.

With a vague sense of apprehension and terror, Meredith had scaled the opposite river-bank to that from which Havilah had come out upon the stream; startled by the crash of the *falling abutment*, he had breathlessly mounted the *wastegate*, and *gained its terminating point above the fall just in time to see the hoped-for communication cut off, and the pal*

victim whom he had sprung to save whirled round equi-distant from himself and the shore. It was a fearful crisis, but no time for hesitating or doubt. Now then, young athlete of the school and the university, now for a feat in which there is no competitor. Eight feet between yourself and the floating beam, as many more to gain the shore, and a bosom of wrath sweeping down on either side. An instant, and the deed is done. It was safety or death for both, and by God's grace safety. With one bound Meredith vaulted upon the timber which reeled beneath his weight. The shock would have tossed Havilah like a feather to the wave, but an iron arm was round her waist, that grasp gave electrical force to her rescuer, the impetus afforded one successful effort, lent him power for a second desperate leap, the deserted timber floated over the precipice, the Englishman and the girl stood in safety on the shore.

It was all the work of a moment, one of those wild, incomprehensible moments which one passes through unconsciously at the time, to shudder at the recollection of it in after years.

Havilah turned and looked up over her shoulder at Meredith, who had not yet released her from his hold, looked inquiringly, as one might look who, miraculously preserved in time of peril, questions whether it be through the mediation of man or angel. She saw, but did not thank him, did not utter a word. There was not time. He had saved her life; but what was one life when so many were at stake? what but the opportunity for further action? Before he could stay her, or question her motives, she was once more beyond his reach; she had slid from his arm like a wreath of mist, and had darted down the cliff. Silently, like a spirit, she sped to her work; but as Meredith's startled senses realized the direction she had taken, he could not refrain from an utterance *of despair, and the air rang with the cry of a strong man in his agony.*

It needed but a glance to reveal the fact that she had been saved from one danger only to expose herself to another

equally hideous and alarming. Asaad had prophesied truly. The factory buildings could not resist the force of the flood; the crash of falling timber and stones could already be distinctly heard, one foundation prop after another was giving way; the tall bell-tower had taken an oblique inclination, and was tottering to its fall; the whole structure must soon be a ruinous heap, and yet Havilah had darted into its midst.

Meredith followed. In his one moment of uncertainty and horror, he had suffered her to gain the start of him, and she was almost out of sight. The white cloak fluttering in the wind served, however, as a signal to guide him. Now it floated round the corner of the factory, then emerged at the opposite angle, the shadow of the bell-tower obscured it for a moment; it came out again on the little footbridge that crossed the stream, here a massive boulder on the further bank hid it altogether from view, and when at length Meredith gained the summit of the great rock, and looked about him, the white signal was altogether wanting, providentially wanting, for now the Englishman paused, awaiting its reappearance, and that pause saved him from a living burial. The piers which sustained the factory tower at the same instant gave way, and the tall column fell with a fearful crash. The stream was narrowed just opposite the silk-mill by the very rock on which Meredith stood, and the tower, taking an oblique direction, fell across the flume, partially obstructing the current, and scattering a storm of rock on the opposite bank. Meredith's elevated position proved his security from the heavier missiles of destruction, but light fragments of brick and granite were showered around him like hail, and he found himself blinded by a thick cloud of dust and mortar, while his ears were almost deafened by the crash of masonry and by the clattering of huge masses of stone which, escaping from the ruinous pile, were rattling down into the valley. Amid the obscure atmosphere and the tumult of sound it was *difficult to discern* the nature or extent of the catastrophe, *but in the very midst* of the shock Meredith realized the fac-

that there was safety where he stood, but destruction below; there was deliverance for himself, but where was Havilah?

The air was still thick with dust, the rocky avalanche still in motion, when Meredith rushed in amid the chaos. His foot sank in loose heaps of mortar, his very breath and the stirring of the air as he passed seemed to start some trembling stone, and send it rumbling down the hill-side. He glanced anxiously from right to left, shuddering at the thought of the dread revelation which might be in store for him. The air cleared as he went on; he had left the heavier heaps of rubbish behind him, for a few steps the moon shone on his path, and he could see his way; then came a space in deep shadow, and here, running at the top of his speed, the young man encountered a sudden obstacle. This impediment to his progress presented itself in the form of a man, who, stationed just outside the old olive-mill, had been beating his breast, uttering loud cries and lamentations, and calling upon heaven for help.

"Who are you? what is the matter?" cried Meredith as he assisted in raising the individual whom he had thrown down and stumbled over in the impetuosity of his onset. "Have you seen the master's daughter? Has Havilah passed this way?" he hastily continued as he set the poor man upon his feet.

"Good God! it is the Howadji," exclaimed the man in the whining tones which Meredith at once recognized, as those of the old miller. "Oh, sir! sir! We are accursed of the Lord. 'The mountains are falling upon us, and the hills covering us.' Help us, for the love of heaven help us!"

"The master's daughter, man!" cried Meredith, with an eagerness that was almost fierce. "Have you seen her, I say?"

"Have I seen her, the pretty saint? Yes! yes, Howadji! *she went by me like a falling star. But she will not come back. The rose will be crushed, and my rose-buds too; my beautiful ones, also asleep on their pillow. Oh, sir, could*

not you save them? you are a young man— you are strong— listen to an old man's prayer;" and he threw himself on the ground, and clasped the Englishman's knees.

Meredith extricated himself, and impatient of this human clog, thrust him to one side, exclaiming emphatically, — "which way? answer me that, and no more; which way?"

"Oh, there, there!" ejaculated the miller, pointing to his own cottage a few rods lower down, and overshadowed by the ancient mill. "There, under the fig-tree, where my roof has fallen in. Havilah is there, and my babe, and the stones have sunk, and the walls are rent, and the house will be buried under the falling mill. It is going; ah, I knew it, and my sweet ones will find a grave under the roof that these hands have raised, and Havilah too! — and I have sent that young Frank to perish with them; may the Lord forgive me!"

The old man was soliloquizing, for the Englishman had obeyed the first motion of his informant's finger, and had left him to tear his hair alone, and pour out his lamentations to the wind.

Meredith approached the hut, fear whispering to him that he might find it but a tomb. The rear end of the little rectangular building rested against the wall of the terrace which formed the foundation of the mill, a perilous support enough, but one which thus far stood firm. The next terrace below had fallen in, however; the cottage rested on an inclined plane, and its roof was gaping wide.

"Havilah! Havilah!" shouted Meredith as he drew near the mouth of the cavity which looked as forbidding and black as if it conducted to the bowels of the earth.

He was answered by something between a sigh and a moan, and the sudden emerging of a head through the opening. As he caught sight of a profusion of dark hair and a fair young face, he gave a cry of joy, and believing he had discovered the object of his search, stretched out his single arm (the arm which was doing all his work to-night, for the other was powerless), and this aided, a little figure sprang

appeared through the aperture, the figure not of Havilah, but of one of those beautiful rosy children born among the Druse mountaineers.

"It is Kassim," said a soft juvenile voice, as the boy scrambled to his feet.

Meredith's heart sank within him, but at the next breath he caught the sound of a still sweeter voice from below saying, "stand still there, Kassim, I will come in one moment."

"One moment! come *now*, Havilah!" cried the young man in the desperation of an intense anxiety, an anxiety which had reached its climax, for he could hear the cracking of the mill above his head, and had already seen some of its supports swept away by the flood.

There was no answer, and resting his arm on one edge of the ruptured roof, he sprang down the aperture.

He found himself in darkness, but groped his way towards a feeble glimmering of light, and passing through a low, sunken doorway, entered a little shed, the outer wall of which was rent from top to bottom, part having fallen outward so as to admit the moonlight, the remainder forming a heap of rubbish in one corner of the apartment. On this heap stood Havilah. Both her arms were raised, and she seemed vainly striving to lift some heavy weight.

"Havilah! dear child!" he shouted, forgetting everything but his fears for her safety — "what are you doing here? For Heaven's sake come away."

"Oh, help me," she cried, at once recognizing his voice, "help me, you are just in time."

She was striving to dislodge a rafter which had fallen cross-wise against the inner wall of the shed. He instantly placed his broad shoulder underneath the timber, and with one effort dislodged it, revealing as he did so a stone niche *in the wall, in which were cradled two sleeping infants.*

"*They are there! they are safe! I was sure of it!*" she *exclaimed in tones of joy and thankfulness.*

"*Hush! hush!*" she continued in the tenderest accents,

for Meredith in his impetuosity had snatched one of the children from its pillow, and it was shrieking violently, "hush, darling, it is Havilah!"

At the voice and the sound of the familiar name, the little creature sprang to her outstretched arms, nestled its head in her bosom, and was comforted. Meredith, taught by experience, lifted the other child carefully, without waking it, and he and Havilah, each with an infant burden in their arms, turned to depart.

But they were not permitted to go as they had come. Their lives were destined to hang once more in the scales of fate. They had passed through the low doorway, and gained the principal though nearly roofless apartment of the dwelling, Meredith leading Havilah by the hand, when the crisis came, and the old over-topping mill fell headlong.

Can we define the sensations of him on whose head the thunder-bolt bursts? Less easily can we paint the emotions of those who had thus encountered chaos. It was all expressed in the tumultuous thought: "Dead and alive again! Lost and found!"

They stood braced against the terrace-wall, rigid and still. The child in Havilah's arms clung to her neck, convulsed with terror; Meredith held her hand as in a vice. Ruin was heaped on ruin all around them, yet there they stood unharmed. Brave old wall! The miller's handy-work was stronger than the miller's faith. It had not crushed his offspring. It had saved them. A fragment of the mill, a huge sheet of rafters and plastered stone, heavy enough to have crushed a score of men, had commenced sliding down the terraced stairway, had found a resting-place on the cottage wall, and sloping thence to a secure foundation on the hill-side below, formed a solid roof of masonry, beneath which, as in a pent-house, the group of refugees had found a shelter.

The light made its way in at the farther extremity of this *impromptu* cave. "Come on," whispered Meredith, as soon as the awful din was succeeded by a stillness scarcely
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solemn; and he led the way. Havilah trod close upon his footsteps. They climbed over mounds of rubbish, scarcely venturing to breathe or look around them, so great was their sense of the insecurity which attended every motion. Not a stone, however, started from its foundation. Hand in hand they silently groped their way, and at length issued through a triangular opening into the moonlight. A moment more and they had passed beyond the line to which the devastating stone had extended.

Havilah now turned back, and as her eye discerned the scene behind her, she faltered forth, "Poor Kassim!" The spot where she had left the boy was a wilderness of heaped-up stone.

"Perhaps he ran on, and escaped," said Meredith, at the same time inwardly shuddering at the almost certain conviction that the child was lost. "If not, he is beyond help. Do not turn back, Havilah," for he saw her hesitate; "every stone shall be turned, I will see to it myself, but you and these children must be thought of first."

At this moment voices were distinctly heard, cries of fear, congratulation, and lament mingled in strange confusion, cries amid which joy became predominant, as a little crowd of villagers appeared in sight, and at once recognized Havilah. The emotion of thanksgiving was mutual, for at the head of the throng came the miller with his little grandson Kassim in his arms. The boy, following the warning of instinct, had made his way unaided to the guardianship of the old man, whose wailing tones had served as a call-bell to summon the little fellow out of the reach of danger.

But grief is stronger than joy, and must have its way. The shouts of congratulation would have been long in subsiding, but they were speedily drowned by the frenzied accents of a woman who rushed into the circle shrieking and *crying for help*. It was Hendia, the young wife of Asaad, *who now, beating her breast, then tossing her arms in the air, implored succour and deliverance for her husband, who as buried beneath his own roof-tree.*

"He is not dead," she cried, "for he has spoken to me. But heavy stones are on his chest, his breath is short, come quickly! come and save him."

"Now then, my men," cried Meredith, placing the child which he carried in the arms of a woman who stood near him. "I have gold for every man who has an arm to spare. On to the rescue of Asaad! Courage, Hendia, he shall soon stand up with the rest of us."

It was no instantaneous feat, no miraculous work of salvation which was called for now. It was patient and almost hopeless labour.

"Here, underneath this wall of stone? impossible!" exclaimed Meredith, as running in advance of a ready gang of followers he stood beside Hendia at the spot which she indicated as that where her husband lay entombed.

"Yes, yes, Howadji! he is there; I have heard his voice. I hear it now;" and she laid her ear to a crevice in the rocks, and listened.

Meredith followed her example. Apparently he was convinced and encouraged, for without a word he commenced rolling away the stones.

A half-dozen men had soon rallied to his aid. Under his direction they laboured diligently and well, his voice spurring them on, his single arm serving as an iron wedge or an elastic lever whenever the work pressed hard.

Havilah, meanwhile, endeavoured to soothe the wretched wife, who had thrown herself upon the ground at a little distance, and was sobbing hysterically.

"What shall I tell her? Is there any hope?" said a voice at Meredith's elbow, when the work had been progressing long but fruitlessly.

He looked round, saw Havilah, and shook his head.

"There is no sound from below," he answered, *speaking low lest he should discourage his men.* "He has ceased *moaning.* Speak to him yourself," he added; "if he *alive he will know your voice.*"

The perspiration was pouring down Meredith's face. His tones were those of a man well-nigh exhausted.

"Drink this," said Havilah, placing a cup of wine in his hand. "I have more here for your men," she continued, glancing at a little jug in her hand, as he looked compassionately on his fellow-workmen, and seemed to hesitate. He took the cup and drank. She placed her mouth against a cavity in the rocks.

"He hears me," she cried at length, springing to her feet. "He has spoke my name. See! see! he is himself trying to throw off the load."

It was true. The surface of the heap of stones was evidently agitated by a force from below. The little crowd (for half the village had by this time collected at the spot) responded to this indication of life and strength on the part of the sufferer by a round of cheers. The labourers, inspired by hope, and each refreshed by a draught of wine, resumed their efforts with new heart. Five minutes more and Asaad responded to their words of cheer by a succession of groans which, woful as they were, proved him to be free from the risk of suffocation.

"Now, my men, all together here; one strong pull and we have done!" exclaimed Meredith, as shoveling away a mass of earth and mortar he disclosed a flat slaty stone, against whose might Asaad was vainly struggling. They pried up one end of the slab, leaned against it with united force, hurled it back with a crash, which caused the bystanders to beat a sudden retreat, and there, wedged between two similar blocks, lay Asaad, crushed within the walls of his prison-house.

It was as if the coffin-lid were lifted; but the dead man refused to rise. He lay still and speechless. Havilah leaned over him, and poured a few drops of wine down his throat. Hendia threw herself upon his bosom with frantic cries.

"*He will revive,*" said Father Lapierre, who had this instant reached the spot, and now, kneeling beside the unfortunate man, pressed a hand upon his heart. "*Take him gently, my sons, and carry him to the church. I will*

follow you, and bring with me dressing for his wounds. You will find I have other sufferers in my hospital, but there is room for all.

"The hand of the Lord is heavy upon us this night, my child," he continued addressing Havilah. "Ah, my friend!" and with a gesture of surprise he held out his hand to Meredith, "you see we have fallen upon evil days, but we have much to be thankful for yet. The danger is past; it has left the village in ruins; my people are houseless; some of them are hurt; but let us thank God, He has not suffered even one of our little ones to perish."

A company of peasants now lifted the helpless Asaad upon their shoulders, and moved off; a part of the crowd, actuated either by curiosity or sympathy, followed, the remainder dispersed in different directions.

Havilah, anxious concerning her father, suffered M. Lapierre to put her arm within his, and conduct her to his cottage. Meredith was about to take the opposite direction, but the missionary, prompted by a quick-breathed word from Havilah, laid him under an imperative arrest.

"Stay, my young friend," was the old pastor's sudden exclamation. "You are a subject for my authority," and he pointed to the sling and ill-adjusted bandage to which his attention had just been attracted. "I am going for lint and ointments, then to my hospital on the hill. I cannot suffer you out of my sight without the promise that you will meet me there."

Meredith gave his parole, and thus they separated.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Ben Hadad, the Jew. (Continued.)

"Good morning, M. Lapierre," exclaimed a voice in the rear of the old missionary, who, on the third day after the catastrophe, stood erect upon the projecting Falcon's Perch and viewed the scene of desolation below.

"Peace be with you, my son," responded the pastor, as he turned and saw the Englishman. "You have been absent from the village since yesterday. I began to fear you had gone as you came, upon the wings of the night wind."

"I have been to visit my hosts at the convent," answered Meredith, taking his stand beside the venerable man. "Old Hubert crept down from his eyrie two days ago, to learn the particulars of the misfortunes here, and carry back tidings to the brethren. I saw him for a moment: it seems that my disappearance on the eve of the disaster has created considerable anxiety at the monastery; and I feared my failing to return would be deemed discourteous, not to say ungrateful, to my old friends there."

"And this suffering member?" interrogated M. Lapierre, laying his hand on Meredith's injured arm.

"Is better," was the reply. "Had the limb been skilfully treated at first, I have no doubt it would have healed before now. As it is, the relief is wonderful, and I have a large stock of patience on hand. The good superior is charmed with the success of his practice. I respected the etiquette which prevails among the medical faculty, so far as to conceal from him the fact that I had had the benefit of other advice, and he feels himself qualified to receive a diploma in view of the wonderful cure he has wrought."

M. Lapierre smiled. "And how does he view the calamitous condition of El Fureidis?"

"With similar self-complacency. He is persuaded that had the village been under the protection of his blessed lady Mary, it might, like the convent, have withstood earthquake and flood; and at the moment when I encountered Father Herbert in the village, he was rousing the credulity of a wonder-stricken group of peasants with accounts of the various campaigns which the favourite saint of the fraternity has for years been carrying on with the elements, and always with unvarying success. It was the first time I had ever seen anything of a proselyting spirit among the simple-hearted *eccluses*."

"They are not the only men," answered M. Lapierre, "who will quote this visitation of Providence as an argument against our Protestant faith. I have within a few days seen several Druse Akals expostulating vehemently with those of their race who have abandoned their ancient mysticisms for our simple belief; and I this morning recognized in the village a well-known Jesuit priest from Zabbe, who will no doubt endeavour to excite the fears and superstitions of the Maronite portion of our population. I do not fear, however, for the steadfastness and patience of the majority of my flock; I find them more reasonable and docile than could have been expected. Some, indeed, are bitter in their murmurings; and a few of our energetic young men, who are bound by no family ties, have already turned their backs upon a place which they believe to be under the curse of the Lord, and have gone to try their fortunes on the sea-board."

"Poor fellows!" said Meredith; "I met them half-way across the mountain, with their wallets on their backs. I am sorry for them — sorry too for this discouragement to the success of your mission."

"Such instances as this do not discourage me," said Father Lapierre. "Even in the most favoured lands, where civil and religious liberty have for centuries exercised their sway, the faith of whole communities is biassed, if not shaped, by their worldly interests; their theology is the superstructure of which gold and policy are the corner-stones; and the former sinks the moment that the latter are undermined. Who can wonder, then, if a people who have found refuge from priestly tyranny and political oppression under a system where prosperity and religion make common cause, should shrink from that chastening of Providence which has in a single night reduced them from comfort and peace to beggary and desperation? For myself, when I see the straits to which my poor people are driven, I can only bless God for that experience of his love which has taught me and many among my flock to trust in him, who, if He is mighty to destroy, is mighty also to save

"So great a calamity," suggested Meredith, "is in itself a call for public sympathy and aid."

M. Lapierre shook his head in the negative. "It would be in your country," said he; "but here, I grieve to say, quite the contrary is to be anticipated. In the first place, the slow and infrequent communication between one point and another will prevent this disaster from becoming widely known. Then, too, the event which to us seems so momentous, is likely to excite little surprise or interest in a region where everything in nature is liable to convulsions and overturns. Such earthquakes as we have recently experienced are by no means uncommon on these mountains, especially at this season of the year, when, owing to some unexplained cause, perhaps to hydrostatic pressure, the gases beneath the surface are subject to ferment and explosion. But these shocks are seldom widely felt, or accompanied by destructive results. I do not hear that any other village on the mountains has suffered at all in proportion to ourselves. I doubt, indeed, whether the internal groan or shudder with which the Lebanon seemed to cast off the weight of El Fureidis from its broad shoulders, would have been the cause of anything more than a night's alarm and a day's speculation and gossip, had it not been for the improvidence of M. Trefoil, and the consequent undermining of all the artificial foundations on which we depended for our security. Singularly enough, the very causes which had accomplished much, and promised more for the prosperity of our people, have been instrumental in their ruin. Ianthe seemed to have an intuitive foresight of some impending calamity. How quickly her sad prophecy has been fulfilled!"

"Did she then distrust the abilities of her husband, and the soundness of his affairs?"

"She had had bitter experience in early life of his want of *prudence and moderation*. She knew that his active, enterprising spirit was accompanied by a corresponding degree of *recklessness and impetuosity*, and naturally feared, that when *unchecked by her influence and persuasion*, he would launch

into more and ruinous speculations. Like most sanguine men, he has always suffered his yearly expenses and outlay to run in advance of his profits; and Ianthe confided to me, some months ago, her anxiety lest he had laid himself under heavy obligations for the means of introducing his final system of improvement into the factories. Poor man! how infatuated he was with the project! It blinded him almost to the last to his wife's slow decline; it closed his eyes to the risk in which he was thoughtlessly involving the villagers, by barring up the mill-stream; in a word, my poor simple-hearted friend was, up to the time of Ianthe's death, engrossed in his new scheme, as a child is engrossed with a toy; and, like a child, he forgot and cast it from him when the utter abandonment of grief had changed the whole current of his ideas."

"It is a pity he ever undertook it!" said Meredith, in a tone of soliloquy, and half blaming himself for the encouragement he was conscious of having afforded to the work. "But the villagers will scarcely find fault with one who has proved the greatest sufferer among them all."

"So far from it," replied Father Lapierre, "I am touched to observe how completely they exonerate him from any share in their misfortunes, and how disinterested they are in their expressions of sympathy for the man to whom they are indebted for all their past prosperity. They see that if their houses are damaged, and in some cases uninhabitable, his little villa is a complete wreck; that while their terrace walls for the most part require only partial repair, his broader and more elaborate garden-plots are completely washed away. They know that if the master closed the flood-gate to their injury, his daughter opened it at the sacrifice of the best part of her heritage. Above all, they are grateful to the Providence which has spared the lives of themselves and their families, while many of them cannot yet speak without tears of the sorrow which has befallen the widowed husband and the motherless child."

"All must feel themselves impoverished in the destruct

of the factory," said Meredith. "It will scarcely ever be rebuilt, I imagine."

"I cannot foresee such a possibility. Even if M. Trefoil's health and mental condition were less shaken, his resources are, I fear, utterly exhausted."

"Have you seen him this morning?"

"Yes; Havilah was persuading him to take some breakfast when I left my cottage. I saw her afterwards leading him across the bridge, to view the wreck of his property."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Meredith; "was that wise?"

"I suggested the idea myself," replied Father Lapierre, "in hopes that the current of his thoughts might be diverted into a new channel; believing that nothing could be more dangerous to his reason than dwelling constantly upon his bereavement."

"And how did the sight of the ruins affect him?"

"Precisely as one is ordinarily impressed by the misfortunes of another man. He surveyed the spectacle with astonishment, reiterated those phrases by which he continually expresses his sense of the universal misery which prevails, but seemed unconscious of any personal loss or responsibility in the matter."

"And so the whole obligation and weight of suffering falls upon his child," said Meredith, anxiously.

"No labour can be said to fall like a weight upon one who assumes it with such cheerfulness as Havilah," observed M. Lapierre. "To see her devotion to her father, one would think he had her undivided care; but the wounded villagers find in her a nurse; the houseless children experience a mother's tenderness at her hands; the strong men look to her for counsel and encouragement; and the heads of the village household hesitate not to cry out to her for bread."

"Poor girl!" ejaculated Meredith, with a sigh and a troubled countenance. "She will be overwhelmed, exhausted; *she is tasked beyond her strength.*"

"Do not fear for her," said Father Lapierre, composedly. "*Her spirit rises with the emergency; she is sufficient unto*"

her day. I trembled, indeed, when I witnessed her agitation beside her mother's death-bed. It was as if the fountains of the deep were broken up. Rest and leisure could not have restored the calm, but God in his mercy has sent her care and toil, and with them, peace. Do not believe, young man, that labour was ever a part of man's curse. Toil was made to follow in the track of sin, but it was for man's sake that the dispensation came, not as an evil but as a remedy. You will some day learn, my son, if you do not know it already, that to work for oneself is an antidote to pain; to work for others is a panacea. If you doubt my words, look in Havilah's countenance, and read a confirmation of their truth. There she goes now," continued the pastor, pointing to a little group that were climbing the village pathway. "Bachmet is with her, and Abou. The old man is leading one of his master's donkeys."

"The little animal seems to be laden with corn," said Meredith, as he watched the approach of the party.

"Yes," replied M. Lapierre, "they have been to seek supplies from the stone granary at the villa, which fortunately escaped the flood. No one will hunger so long as that storehouse will furnish food. But it cannot hold out long thus gratuitously distributed. God help my poor people when this stronghold fails!"

"They must return to their work," said Meredith, with decision; "their houses and vineyards are shattered and wasted, I know, but the farm lands of the plain yet promise a harvest."

"True," rejoined M. Lapierre, "and my argument concerning labour can never be more applicable than in their case. Their miseries would be half relieved if they were once more actively employed, and saved from that temptation to gossip over and dilate upon their losses, which is the greatest snare to the industrious habits of our talkative and gregarious people. But you do not realize half their discouragement. In lands where taxation is moderate, and justice fairly administered, communities may hope to gradually recover from a shock like the present, but the misfortunes of our peasantry

so far from exciting sympathy, only expose them to the cupidity of a class of men who proverbially lie in wait for occasions to satisfy their greediness and rapacity, and who will soon, I doubt not, pounce like vultures upon my poor flock."

"How so?" questioned Meredith; "is it not a proverb with you that the wayfarer who is stripped is safe from the robber?"

"I will answer you in the equally trite saying, that when one leg is disabled, the meanest thing combines to trip up the other. So long as the prosperity of El Fureidis continued unshaken, it was one among those favoured villages of the Lebanon which furnished sufficient for the wants of its households and the exertions of the tax-gatherers. The rulers must be satisfied if the people starve, and nothing therefore remains for beggared peasantry but to submit to the interference of those farmers of the revenue, who, loaning money at usurious rates of interest, profess to stand between the emir and his subjects, but who in reality defraud the former, grind and oppress the latter, and fill their own pockets at the expense of both. It is a hard lot in any case to live under an unrighteous rule, but woe be to those who, suffering intermediate agents to stand between them and their rightful lord, find themselves lowest in that scale when wrong begets wrong and oppressions accumulate in a descending ratio! So fully has experience justified this fact, that the Syrian can scarcely devise a more fearful malediction against his enemy than this, 'May the Lord multiply your sheiks!'"

"Why not persuade the villagers, then," said Meredith, his countenance manifesting a lively interest in the subject, "to take an independent stand, and hold themselves aloof from such dangerous arbitration?"

"Because, my friend," answered the pastor, "they cannot stand alone; their wants are pressing — without capital they cannot even make the necessary repairs in their terraces and orchards. These harpies, in the guise of friends, will tempt *them with money*, and for the present I see nothing for the *poor husbandmen* but to make the best contract they can.

Even now they are deliberating upon their fate," continued Father Lapierre, pointing out a knot of men who were earnestly gesticulating at a little distance. "I must find some means to disperse them: they are only aggravating each other's hardships by mutual comparison. This idleness is ruinous; they might at least employ themselves in clearing away the rubbish from their dwellings. M. Trefoil is alone in my cottage, Mr. Meredith," added the missionary, as leaning upon his staff he set off to expostulate with the people of his charge. "Will you give him your company in his daughter's absence? He asked for you last evening — the first time he has asked for any one since the day we buried Ianthe. I do not despair of your exercising a beneficial influence upon our poor friend."

"I will see him immediately," was Meredith's prompt reply.

It was afternoon of the same day, and Asaad, still weak and cramped in consequence of his recent sufferings, had crept out from Father Lapierre's hospital, and seated himself on the stone steps of the little church. The poor fellow's attitude was dejected, the prospect before him, both literally and figuratively speaking, was anything but encouraging. His home, his health, his occupation, all were gone, and wherever his eye wandered it encountered the symptoms of a despondency equal to his own. At a little distance from him stood two men, the one, a tall, sun-burnt mountaineer, who, with uplifted hands and a deprecating expression of face, was vehemently resisting the arguments of his companion, a small, sinister looking individual, with heavy eyebrows, gray beard, and a hooked nose. The dress and demeanour of the latter alike marked him as a stranger. He wore a soiled tarboosh, and a long garment of coarse black cloth. With his left hand he grasped the neck of a leathern pouch which he wore, and then tapped with the forefinger of the right palm, as if trying to express his plausible words by this insinuating gesture. With one eye obliquely cast, he took the mental measure of his opponent, the other he never once removed from his lean, miniature donkey, which, laden with saddle-bags, was devour-

ing to its own and its master's satisfaction a little heap of dhourra, the contents of a damaged grain jar which the half-starved animal had smelt out amid the rubbish of the peasant's dwelling.

Apparently the ill-looking man carried his point, for he presently tapped the injestic-looking Syrian on the shoulder, with the patronizing tap with which one puts the final seal upon a victim, and turned away to exercise his persuasions elsewhere. The dissatisfied but despairing peasant winced under the familiar touch, slunk back a few steps, improved the moment when his persecutor's back was turned, to bestow an infuriated kick upon the thin-ribbed donkey, and then stood leaning against his door-post in hopeless apathy, deaf to the cries of his children, and indifferent to the petition of his faithful helpmate, who begged to be made a partner to the conditions of his fate.

The stranger, leading his donkey by the bridle, passed on to the next cottage. Its owner was or feigned to be busy in his ruined court-yard. Even the highest officers of state respect the domestic privacy of the humblest Oriental, and the mean pettifogger in rents and taxes could only stand without and hail the object of his visit.

In a sharp key the stranger summoned the husbandman to a parley; but the call was disregarded. He reiterated his cry, accompanying it with a threat, but the stout Druse, shrinking from the shackles which he well knew awaited his freedom, maintained an obstinate silence, and the stranger and his donkey passed on.

Two men stood ready to receive him. Braced against a terrace wall, united in counsel, with the woe-begone but excited faces anticipating the word of march, but universally stirred to rebellion, they awaited his proposition. The remorseless man of money broached his terms. The pair stood *aghast*.

"*Who is that villanous-looking rascal?*" exclaimed a *clear voice in the rear of Asaad.*

The latter looked up over his shoulder, and saw the

Englishman. "It is Ben Hadad, the Armenian Jew," answered Asaad with a groan.

"What is the old night-owl doing here?"

"Buying up the people's life blood, Howadji. That wretched donkey carries on his back the price of every man's freedom in El Fureidis."

"Ha! the hardened usurer!" cried Meredith. "And his terms, Asaad? At what rate does he loan his gold?"

"Twenty, thirty, forty per cent. — whatever he can wring from human necessities. Our misfortunes have made it fifty to-day if those men's faces do not lie;" and Asaad pointed to the hard-pressed couple with whom the Jew was chaffering.

"The Israelite has brought his money-bags to the wrong market," said Meredith. "He shall find himself outbid. Hark ye, Asaad! Can you carry a message? Have you strength enough left to clip the wings of that bird of prey?"

A ray of light shot through the dim eye of Asaad. "He ruined my father more than a score of years ago," exclaimed the ex-foreman vehemently. "The sight of him chills my blood. But it would fire my soul to put a stumbling-block in his path. These sore limbs would be healed by running on any errand that would thwart Ben Hadad's schemes."

"Listen then;" and the Englishman distinctly pronounced the words of the proclamation which he authorized Asaad to circulate through the village.

"Do you mean so, Howadji? Can I trust my ears?" cried Asaad, springing from his seat with the elasticity of a well man.

"I mean what I say," said Meredith; "but you must lose no time in fulfilling your errand."

Asaad snatched his turban from his head, and tossed it in the air, gave a triumphant shout, and hastened down the village pathway, proceeding, it is true, at a spring halt, but wholly unconscious of what would a moment before have been torture to his cramped and swollen limbs.

El Fureidis.

Meredith, without waiting to watch the effect of his communication, set out for a solitary walk upon the mountains.

"Is it the softness of the summer air, or the beauty of the sunset, or faith in the love of heaven, good father, which makes the people so cheerful and happy to-night?" asked Havilah, as returning about sundown from active duty in the village, she joined M. Lapierre, who stood leaning on his staff at an angle of his cottage wall.

"The love of heaven, no doubt, my child," answered the missionary, "though in this, as in many instances, it has come in the guise of man's benefactions."

"Not in the benefactions of the man Ben Hadad, I trust?" said Havilah, "I have heard the customary laugh ringing once more round the sycamore-tree. Beni Salhook, who was yesterday the most discouraged of all the peasants, has begun to repair his broken roof to-day, and is now smoking a pipe in his court-yard; and Saad, the miller, who, forgetting the salvation of his family, has done nothing since the accident to his mill but groan and wring his hands, is singing."

She checked herself abruptly, as, coming close to Father Lapierre, she caught sight of Meredith, who had returned from his stroll, and now stood with an abstracted air and a countenance of extreme gravity just around the corner of the cottage wall, which had until this moment concealed him from her view. She had met him occasionally since the night of the catastrophe; they had even reciprocated slight offices of attention and service, but had never, as now, encountered each other at a moment of quiet and mutual leisure. Havilah was slightly disconcerted, but Meredith did not seem to observe her embarrassment; he scarcely glanced at her; he even walked away a few steps, as if to *avoid interrupting* a conversation in which he claimed no *part*.

"So old Saad is singing, is he?" asked Father Lapierre, *with an animated expression of interest.*

"Yes," said Havilah, resuming her narrative; "singing a holiday song to his grandchildren. There seems to be a jubilee among the villagers: I had not the heart to stop and question them; I was afraid their merriment was only echoing the hollow chink of Ben Hadad's gold."

"In that case their laughter would soon be turned to mourning, and their joy to heaviness," said Father Lapierre. "But their gladness springs from a deeper source, and has a better security than any fair promises of the Jew, Havilah. El Fureidis may well sound a note of jubilee to-night, for she is safely rid of the stinging scorpion. Ben Hadad has gone back over the mountains, his money-bags as full as when he came hither, but his hungry soul unsatisfied."

"And the people?" questioned Havilah, with a relieved, but still anxious countenance.

"The people have found a surer banker, a more faithful friend, my child," said the missionary, laying a soothing hand upon Havilah's head, as if to temper beforehand the agitation which he foresaw his communication would arouse. "The Englishman (and the old man glanced significantly at Meredith) has promised money to meet all their necessities; he will make a contract with the government; he himself will farm the land."

For a moment Havilah stood gazing at M. Lapierre, as if her mind needed time to comprehend so great a truth; then tears of joy started to her eyes; a weight was lifted from her heart, which fluttered like a bird set free. She forgot herself; was lost to everything but one rapturous sense of gratitude. With radiant face, and both hands outstretched, she ran towards Meredith, who, out of hearing of her dialogue with M. Lapierre, stood looking abroad into the valley. His arms were folded over his breast, the prevailing joy had reacted on the mind, which had found relief in the sympathy with other's pain; his soul was filled with gloom, he did not perceive Havilah until she stood opposite to him with the window of her soul wide open.

"You will repair the wrong my father has done," she ex-

"You will save my mother's poor — Heaven will reward and bless you; heaven only can."

He looked down upon her with grave wonder, as one might look at a flower that had suddenly burst into bloom at his feet, then slowly unfolded his arms, took her offered hands in his, and answered with a chill, melancholy tone, which was calculated to check and freeze her enthusiasm, "I ask for no rewards, and I deserve no blessings at the hand of God or man, Havilah. I have never served humanity or heaven. Let no one look for good at my hand; I seek only to gratify the whim of an idler. One can scarcely claim any merit," he added with scarce perceptible irony, "for entering into competition with a Jewish knave and usurer."

The serene and settled hopelessness of his tone and manner impressed Havilah even more than his bitter words. She withdrew the hands, which he could scarcely be said to have retained at all, so cold and lifeless was his grasp. She would gladly have deprecated that self-condemnation by which her heart told her that he wronged a generous nature, but misery, which asks for no sympathy and acknowledges no claim, is a forbidding thing. Havilah was awed by the spirit of gloom which she had herself invoked. Her eyelids drooped, her lips refused any utterance. Subdued and silenced, she stole away from Meredith's side, passed Father Lapierre without even a look, and sought refuge in the cottage.

"He carries happiness in his hand, but sorrow is at his heart," was her inward meditation. "He scatters blessings, but himself eats the bread of grief." The gentle compassion which many had shared was now all expended on one, and Havilah brushed away a tear, the same tear which a moment ago joy had sent flashing to her eye, but which transformed itself ere it fell into a tear of pity.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Meredith a Benefactor.

IN a certain sense Meredith spoke the truth when he pronounced his resolution to farm the land to be the whim of an idle man, for the benevolent purpose, doubtless, had its source in emotions which forbade him, the strong, the rich, the independent, to look idly on while the poor were starving, and the old and the feeble were spending their strength in vain. But however much caprice might have influenced the man with whom impulse was always active, Meredith was not one to put his hand to the plough and then turn back, and he soon became a farmer in good earnest.

It was not enough to furnish money to the peasant, and stand as a nominal barrier betwixt him and his oppressors. The Lebanon mountaineers, though physically fearless, and brave and capable, as all mountain races are, of making forcible resistance to any attack upon their personal liberty, are, nevertheless, children in their simplicity and trustfulness of character. Exposed to political fraud and duplicity, they have long been accustomed to seek shelter under the wings of some feudal protector; and though often deceived and betrayed, they are glad to purchase immunity from risk at the price of a faithful allegiance. El Fureidis, more fortunate than its neighbours, had for years enjoyed prosperity and peace under the honest guardianship of M. Trefoil; in the incompetency of the master, the little village had felt itself orphaned, and finding in Meredith at once a benefactor and a mediator, it hailed him in eastern parlance, not only as "father of riches," but as "parent of wisdom," and "strong arm of safety and power."

Thus the Englishman found himself brought into individual relations with the peasantry such as he never had foreseen, such, indeed, as his reserved nature would have repelled had they been other than the gradual growth of circumstances.

Each householder felt himself responsible to the Howadji for the just use of his borrowed capital; each petty husbandman claimed a right to the Howadji's advice in respect to tillage and crops. The ploughman of the Behaa would postpone buying a yoke of oxen until the animals had been inspected by the English eye; even the village matrons anticipated with no little anxiety the tall young Frank's encroachments upon their vegetable gardens and poultry yards. He became the arbiter of disputes, the judge from whose decision there was no appeal; and in the occasional visits which he made to the cities of the sea-board, he found himself, to his own surprise, the commissioned agent for the purchase of farming tools, provisions, and household utensils.

In all this he asked for no recompense, he hoped for none; but he nevertheless found his reward; not in Havilah's approbation or encouragement, for they laboured in different spheres; met but seldom, and betrayed no consciousness of each other's pursuits; but occupation was medicine to his soul, and Father Lapierre's prescription was already working the patient's cure.

Not that Meredith carried a light heart into his labours; not that he became in any degree oblivious of the past. He was everywhere, and at all times, thoughtful, grave, and sad; but life had become to him more earnest, his deeper sympathies were aroused, his human instincts quickened. Each day brought duties which could not be postponed or delegated to another. The welfare of a whole community was involved in them. The cry for help appealed first to his purse, then to his time, finally to his heart.

Havilah met him one morning outside the door of Tyiby's cottage. The young girl carried in her hand a basin of broth for Tyiby's sick son, who had rallied from the fever of the previous season only to waste with slow decline. "You will be welcome," said Meredith, as, having touched his hat, and courteously wished her good morning, he stepped back a pace or two, and held open the heavy door through which he had passed, and which he had left swinging on its pivot. "The

boy is faint with long fasting, and the house affords no suitable food. I was about to send a message to you."

"He has watched beside my boy's bed ever since the shadows of nightfall," said Tyiby, as she took the basin from Havilah's hand, and looked after the retreating Englishman.

"A mother's blessing rest on his English hearth and home!"

"He is the last of his race, Tyiby," said Havilah, solemnly. "His father and sister have died in his absence. The tidings have come to him over the sea. Father Lapierre told me yesterday."

"Ah, the unfortunate one! May the Lord compassionate him!" exclaimed Tyiby, with feeling. "But, truly, O child of Ianthel!" she continued in a tone which had changed from that of sympathy to Christian triumph — "the Righteous One has not afflicted him in vain. Trouble has laid her hand on his brow;" and the woman, with expressive gesture, drew her finger in horizontal lines across her own forehead; "but sorrow is good seed sown here" (and she touched her heart). "Sunshine is beautiful on young heads, Havilah; but it is the soft rain which ripens the harvests."

Havilah was deeply struck with the truth and its phraseology. Tyiby had unconsciously drawn the reverse side of that picture which Havilah had painted for her mother several months ago.

On another occasion, when Havilah was returning from Barûk on one of her father's donkeys, and accompanied only by Abou, she met in a narrow mountain-pass a young man leading a camel. The unwieldy "ship of the desert" was on an outward passage, laden merely with an axe, a clumsy saw, and a few iron wedges. It was destined to make the return voyage freighted with freshly-cut timber, for its master, son of Saad the miller, was a vigorous woodcutter, and the repairs going forward at El Fureidis had given an impetus to men of *his craft*.

Havilah stopped to exchange salutations, and inquired after his children, who, having lost their mother within a year of

were ordinarily intrusted to the old miller's care during their father's absences on the mountain.

"My fledglings are well," answered the young man, dropping upon one knee, and kissing Havilah's hand with a grace which belongs to the Oriental of every grade. "Blessings, lady, on those who saved their innocent lives!"

"The Englishman was prompt in rescuing the sufferers that night," said Havilah. "You are going to cut wood?"

She desired to give a new term to the dialogue, but the young man interrupted her. "The stately deer," exclaimed he, "is sure to follow where the young doe leads the way, but a father's blessing on you both. The master's daughter has the first place in the people's heart; but we know how to be grateful to the Englishman. I beheld him an hour ago smoking a pipe in my father's court-yard. Kassim was playing with the white hound of the Howadji — little blossom was sitting on his knee. The old man's face was a fountain of gladness, for the Frank has pledged his word that before the olives are ripe in the orchards, the mill shall stand in its place again, and be ready to press out the oil."

"How generous he is!" said Havilah, with enthusiasm. "He is a prince in his bounty. I hope the people are loyal to him."

"The Howadji was a prince, O daughter of Trefoil," said the woodman, "when he sat erect on his horse, and scattered paras to the poor; but now he is something less than a prince, and something more, for the peasants have found in him a brother. We admire and fear the proud eagle which soars afar off and looks at the sun, but the swallow which hears our children's call, and nestles under our roof-tree, that is the bird which we love."

"How that proud English heart has melted! How the stranger has won the people's love!" thought Havilah, as she journeyed homeward. She was musing thus as she drew near the village. "Behold the Howadji!" cried Abou, who was riding in the rear.

"Where!" exclaimed Havilah, starting from her reverie.

The old steward pointed to a figure at a little distance, and approaching by the same path they were pursuing. A broad-brimmed hat concealed his face; his eyes were fixed on the ground.

"This way, Abou," said Havilah, giving a sudden nervous twitch to her rein, and diverging into a side path overshadowed with shrubbery.

"Go on, Abou, your donkey is fresher than mine."

The old man went past his mistress at a trot. She loitered a moment under the shade of a clustering vine. The Englishman came up the steep pathway, absent-minded, thoughtful, and slow. With his cane he marked little circles on the ground, — a melancholy habit always. He never once raised his eyes. Ignorantly he passed within a few feet of Havilah. It would have diverted perhaps the current of his meditations had he known that she lingered there, watched his coming, traced the lines of sadness on his face, and sighed, went on a few paces, paused, looked back, and sighed again.

Meredith had become a conscientious labourer, but his temperament was not one which could be satisfied with slow results, and fortunately for his yet unschooled patience, evidences of success were not long wanting. In the genial climate and fruitful soil of Lebanon, the disasters of a season, the loss of a few week's spring-time are not so fatal to vegetation as in lands where the entire summer can scarcely ripen a single crop of grain. Industry rather than skill sufficed to repair all damages to the simple dwellings and rough terrace walls of the peasants of El Fureidis — man, inspired by hope, wrought early and late, and Nature did all the rest. Thus El Fureidis soon rose upon its ruins; shrubs, herbs, and vines grew, stretched, and clambered, as if striving to atone for past delay, flowers recarpeted the earth, and gardens of promise smiled where desolation had darkly frowned.

Thus the scripture promise was literally fulfilled to the villagers. They had beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

One source of past prosperity, however, was wanting to

Fureidis, nor did there seem to be any prospect of its revival. The factory, which had furnished the peasants with regular employment, and provided a sure market for their silk produce, still remained precisely as it fell on the night of the catastrophe, as hopeless a ruin apparently as those of the Canaanitish temples on the mountain-top.

The loss of this life-spring of industry and revenue, with its bearing upon the fortunes of both people and master, was naturally a subject of speculation to all who cherished an interest in the common welfare, and it furnished a subject for much deliberation between M. Lapierre and Meredith, who might deservedly be styled, one the counsellor, the other the financier of the district.

These two men at this time shared a common dwelling. With the freakishness of a clouded mind, M. Trefoil, once domiciled in M. Lapierre's cottage, proved loth to quit it for any other abode. Simple as were its arrangements, it afforded on the whole more comforts than remained in the dilapidated house of the manufacturer, and it was therefore decided that he should continue to occupy it for the present. Havilah, making light of her privations, cheerfully took possession of the little inner apartment, and Father Lapierre found in the least shattered rooms at the villa all the accomodation which his hardy habits demanded. For a while the convent continued to be Meredith's nominal home, but gradually, as the demands upon his time made a nearer residence to the village desirable, he became domesticated in the very apartment which had formerly been allotted him in the dwelling of M. Trefoil. Its walls, indeed, were rent, its carpet and divans soiled and disfigured, its furniture broken or defaced; but Meredith was becoming an anchorite in the matter of luxuries; the perfection of nature, and the unrivalled atmosphere without atoned for every in-door discomfort, and the missionary and the Englishman experienced no conscious wants in their household.

They were sitting together one afternoon in the central room, which was the portion of the villa that had sustained

least injury from the shock. It was evident that their conversation had been neither desultory nor languid, for though the day was warm, and the hour one usually devoted to repose, their attitude and expression betrayed the earnestness of men engaged in mutual counsel. It would seem that Meredith had been giving an account of his stewardship, for he held in his hand a long memorandum of rents and charges, which he finally folded and replaced in his pocket, saying, as he did so, "I have made it as simple as possible, and have so managed, that I believe each landholder will be able to meet his payments as they fall due. If not, I leave it with you, my dear sir, to grant any reprieves you see fit. The business is simple; I have been gradually initiating Asaad into all its details, and know no reason why he cannot henceforth represent me here."

"And you will leave us then?" said Father Lapierre.

"Yes; there are those in England whom my father cared for and befriended, and who now have claims on me, claims which I might selfishly have overlooked or slighted, but for the lesson taught me here. My presence is no longer needed in El Fureidis. In England I believe I can be of use."

"Go then, my son," said Father Lapierre, "and God go with you. Heaven's breezes fill the sails of him who has duty for his rudder."

"There is still one subject on which I would speak with you," said Meredith, hesitatingly.

"Speak on, my son."

"M. Trefoil, his resources, his future means of support, — have you penetrated the mystery which clouds his affairs?"

"Not at all. Our friend's usual apathy in respect to the business which recently engrossed him is only equalled by the inconsistency of the statements which he has from time to time made to me. On most subjects his mind has to a great degree recovered its tone, but I almost despair of ever obtaining any clear insight into his pecuniary condition. I know of but one man who could throw any light upon this obscurity — and that is Mustapha Osman, the rich Turkish merchant at Damascus. He is the agent to whom M. Trefoil's merchand-

has been regularly consigned. Some surplus funds may yet remain in his hands. I strongly suspect, however, that the balance stands in Mustapha's favour. In the latter case, I fear M. Trefoil and his child are worse than beggared."

"They must not want," said Meredith, in a tone of resolve, "nor need they. M. Trefoil's state of mind is childish and unquestioning. Havilah is ignorant of her father's insolvency, both will accept your guardianship. You will labour among your flock; Havilah, as ever, will second all your efforts. It is a mission which those who cannot actively aid should at least be proud to maintain. Let that be my care. Do not forbid me this small privilege, this sole consolation," he continued with passionate eagerness, as he already saw denial written on the features of M. Lapierre. "What you refuse to friendship, you will at least let me lay on the altar of duty. Oh, sir, you forget what I owe to your ministry and her example. Here I might not perhaps be your almoner; but if I go away — if I put two thousand miles betwixt myself and El Fureidis, if I am unknown in the matter to all but yourself, there need be no scruples then. Oh, my dear friend," he added, enforcing his plea by a boyish urgency of tone and gesture, "I only ask to be a silent partner in your labours; do you understand me?"

"Too well, my son," said M. Lapierre, smiling kindly on the young man, but at the same time shaking his head from side to side in slow emphatic negative to his appeal. "Havilah must not be deceived. If she served Christ for hire, she must not do it in ignorance; she must not engage even in Christian warfare without knowing at whose charge. The free child of the mountain must not be trammelled by even secret obligations. Do not chafe at the term," he continued, silencing by a wave of his hand the expostulation which Meredith was about to utter. "I do not misunderstand you. I know you *would be the last to esteem them obligations, but such they would nevertheless be.* Havilah is a courageous girl, she will *not fear to meet the truth.*"

"*But the truth is cruel, it will not spare,*" cried Meredith,

in tones of positive anguish. "I see written on its face, famine, cold, and want, a childish father, a roofless home, an empty store-house, an unprotected child. Sir," subjoined he, peremptorily, "I was Havilah's mother's friend; I have a *right* to befriend Havilah."

"Your right shall not be disputed," said Father Lapierre, soothingly. "But whatever you do must be done openly, and with Havilah's consent."

"That can never be," exclaimed Meredith, with abruptness.

"To be frank with you, I doubt if it can in the form to which you have alluded," responded M. Lapierre; "but do not despair of the future fortunes of M. Trefoil. You may yourself aid in opening his pathway to better days. It is possible you may be more successful than I have been in discerning some clue to his embarrassments. Have you ever questioned him in reference to pecuniary matters?"

"I have not presumed to do so."

"Under the circumstances, it would be no presumption. Follow up the hint that I have given you regarding Mustapha Osman. Obtain what information you can. I will reflect upon the subject of our friend's affairs, and speak with you again. Meanwhile, do not question, my son, that whatever be the lot of Havilah and her father, it will be well, for is it not of the Lord's appointing?"

The pastor's hour of leisure was ended, and taking up his staff he went out. Meredith looked at his watch. It was near the time when Havilah usually met the missionary at the village-school, and thinking it probable that he should find M. Trefoil alone, Meredith sallied forth for the visit which it had become customary with him to take this opportunity of paying the afflicted man.

The door of the primitive parsonage stood open, and Meredith had gained the threshold, when he was arrested by the sound of Havilah's voice from within. She seemed to be *reading aloud*, and Meredith hastily retreated. But he was *o late*. His shadow had fallen across the floor; M. Trefoil

recognized his figure as he withdrew, and called to him in a tone so much more cheerful than was the widower's wont, that Meredith was arrested less by the words, "hey, my friend, come in!" than by surprise at the heartiness of the salutation, a heartiness resembling that of former days.

Thus summoned, he entered the dwelling, the inner obscurity of which contrasted so strongly with the midday glare outside, that his eye could only gradually distinguish the occupants of the apartment. M. Trefoil himself was the most prominent object. Wrapped in a flowered dressing-gown, his feet encased in yellow slippers, and his red tarboosh pushed back from his forehead, he sat upright upon the centre of the divan, and Meredith saw at a glance that his countenance wore an expression of animation which had been wanting for many weeks past. Havilah, with Ayib beside her, was seated on a cushion at her father's feet. An open letter was on her lap. Meredith did not see her until the gazelle rubbed its head against his hand to attract attention. He then looked down at the little creature, perceived its mistress also, and bowed. Havilah met his glance, bent her head in acknowledgment, and kept her eyes fixed upon the written page from which she had been reading. At the same moment there was a slight movement in a remote part of the room, a dark figure in loose drapery rose from the corner in which it had hitherto been concealed, and came forward a pace or two.

"Ah, Abdoul, my boy, is that you?" exclaimed Meredith, with a start of surprise as he recognized his Arab guide, of whom he had heard and seen nothing since the youth disappeared unnoticed by any one on the day of Ianthe's burial.

Abdoul answered only by a silent obeisance, and retreating into his corner with one hand pressed upon his heart, slunk back against the wall, drew his turban over his brow, and folded his long supple arms, or rather intertwined them like a cable across his breast.

"Sit down, Mr. Meredith, sit down," cried M. Trefoil,

with something of that clear ring to his voice which had formerly lent cordiality to his hospitable entreaties.

Meredith took the seat to which his friend pointed.

"We have news," continued the latter, in a tone at once elated and confidential, "news from an unexpected quarter, and very welcome news too. Abdoul is a child of the desert, but he sees the world for all that. Abdoul is fresh from the Paris of the Orient. He brings us the latest tidings from Damascus, and, what is best of all, a letter from my friend Mustapha Osman. Mustapha Osman has been my friend for years, Mr. Meredith, ever since I have been in El Fureidís; he is my consignee, my business agent, the framer of my fortunes I may say. His own fortune is large — large, sir, it is gigantic; so is his heart; he has the heart of an emperor. He has written me a letter full of sympathy, not a word of business, but sympathy; yes, real sympathy;" and with that quick transition of feeling which betrayed the still enfeebled mind, M. Trefoil as he repeated the last word became suddenly subdued in his transitory flow of spirits, and added in a broken voice, wiping the tears from his eyes, "but you must hear what he says. Havilah, read the letter to Mr. Meredith; begin at the beginning, my daughter; I shall like to hear it again;" and M. Trefoil threw his handkerchief over his face, and settled himself on the divan preparatory to listening for the third time to the grateful contents of the epistle.

The letter, which Havilah read in distinct, though now and then trembling utterance, ran thus: —

"Peace be with thee, O Augustine, brother of my heart, and widowed husband of Ianthe—peace be with thee, O man greatly bereaved! and may He that pitieth and comforteth shower upon thee and upon thy household the choicest blessings with which He blesses. I extend my hand unto thee, O my brother, and embrace thee in my heart of hearts. I can take the measure of thy consuming sorrow, for did not the angel of death snatch from my bosom the faithful Fatimah, and bear her to the paradise of the prophet? Time, the consoler, has lifted up the head that was bowed down, but my spirit yet yearns

for the beloved spouse of my youth, Fatimah, chief among women. Thus I hail thee, O man of sorrow, and salute thee as a companion who has drunk with me from the bitter wells of affliction. Peace be with the dove-eyed daughter of thine house, who reposes no longer in the maternal breast; peace and benediction on the dark-haired Havilah, who came hither with thee a bud of promise; and whom Abdoul, son of Zana-deen, styles the Lebanon rose. Say to the blooming maid, that Maysunah, sole child of my affection, has ripened but to fade. She droops like a flower whose stem no longer drinks in the dew.

"Tell him of the snowy beard, dwelling beside thee on the sacred mount, that the aching soul of Mustapha remembers the gifts of his healing hand, and craves them for his child.

"Come hither, I pray thee, O Augustine, my brother; Damascus, a throned queen, sits among her gardens. Her fragrant breezes woo the sick at heart. The doors of Mustapha stand open wide; his spirit welcomes thee from afar. Come hither, and bring with thee a fair mate to Maysunah's loneliness, and him to whom Allah has given power to read disease and apply the remedy.

"Farewell, may thy soul take refuge with the Highest! The ancient of benefits be thy protection, and so fulfil the prayer of Mustapha.

"Written in the name of Allah, and in the faith of Allah's prophet."

There was a short silence as Havilah finished reading. It was broken by M. Trefoil, who suddenly snatching away the handkerchief from his face, exclaimed energetically, "Havilah, we must go to Damascus. Father Lapierre never refuses the call of the unfortunate. I must see my friend Mustapha. The journey will invigorate us all; we will go."

With a startled expression Havilah rose and stood leaning on her father's shoulder, out of reach of his eyes. His sudden resolution and announcement alarmed her, and not without reason. It was difficult to judge whether they were the result

of restored powers, or of an excitement more unnatural and painful than his previous dullness and apathy. She made no answer to his proposition.

"What say you, my child?" he asked looking up into her face.

"As you think best," she answered dutifully, though with effort. Her heart trembled, not for herself, but for him. Already she foresaw and dreaded all the perils of the way.

But M. Trefoil dreaded nothing. His elastic spirit was on the rebound. In a tone of exhilaration he now addressed himself to Meredith. "You will go with us, my friend?" he said in a tone of confident assertion.

Meredith, unprepared for such a challenge, hesitated, and glanced at Havilah. Her eye was fixed upon him, as if in his answer was her only hope.

"I will," he answered with decision.

"It is settled then, and we all go to Damascus in company," proclaimed M. Trefoil, rubbing his hands together in the characteristic way, as a token of satisfaction; and a new and welcome turn thus given to his thoughts, he exhausted an hour of conversation in forming plans and making suggestions concerning the journey so abruptly determined on. But he alone was at ease. Havilah looked distressed and anxious, Meredith doubtful of the part he was expected to play.

As he rose to go, and M. Trefoil preceded him through the doorway, the young man stepped back; and, resolved to make sure of his position, said in a low, and apologetic tone; "have I offended Havilah by my promise to her father?" . "Offended! O no!" she answered, her eyes glistening through tears. "You are our best friend. You are like a father to the villagers, you are like a son to my father."

As she inadvertently spoke the last words, and their import flashed upon her, the beautiful face, which a moment before had been unnaturally pale, became deeply tinged with crimson.

But Meredith, if he observed, mistook the cause of it
Et Fureidis.

confusion. In his manly simplicity he gave only the most natural interpretation to her words, and replied, as if reassured on a mere point of doubt; "Thank you; you are too kind; I do not deserve your praise; but with your permission I shall be proud and happy to travel with you to Damascus;" and his resolution thus confirmed, he bade her farewell.

In the corner, meanwhile, sat one who needed no such confirmation to the truth. He could not hear the last low-spoken words of the Englishman and Havilah, nor did his quick instincts demand any such literal medium of intercourse. With that keenness unknown to the civilized man, the young savage had marked that mutual play of feature which was to him an open book. His flashing eyes, like electric balls, had interrupted the subtle fluid which was transmitted along the line of thought, and with unerring accuracy he read the import of the telegraphic message.

CHAPTER XXV.

Journey to Damascus.

PASS over now the preparations for journeying, and behold our travellers on their route to Damascus. A pilgrim band winding single file over a precipitous pass furnishes a picturesque scene in any mountain land. In Lebanon, to follow such a company is to turn the pages of a gilded romance.

Nature unfolds all her treasures, and tells a story of every clime; grandeur and softness, ruggedness and beauty, richness and desolation, alternate in the tale, and the moving figures in the foreground of the panorama lend interest and life to the whole. Here the gay trappings of horses and mules, the flowing robes of guides and dragomen, contrast with a *heavy background* of gray rock or pine; there the little procession has come out into the sunlight, which flashes back from *silver-mounted bridles, sabre-hilts, and glittering gun-barrels*. As men and animals wind along the brow of some *steep declivity*, the minute outlines of their forms are defined

against the clear blue sky; as they descend into the shady wadys or rocky ravines, the procession is lost to sight, to reappear at some unexpected cleft in the mountain-side.

The bridle-path was intricate, but well known to the inhabitants of the district, and two native muleteers led the van of M. Trefoil's party. Beside the animals which they rode, they each had charge of a sumpter mule, laden with the cumbrous equipment essential on a Syrian journey, where no wayside inn awaits the traveller. Meredith followed, mounted on the jet-black Arabian, which had been the companion of many months' wandering, and which was obedient to the slightest word of its rider. When he and Abdoul forsook both baggage and saddlehorses to join the funeral train of Ianthe, all their steeds made instant escape in the direction of the desert, and it was in pursuance of their tracks that, later in the evening, Abdoul likewise fled from El Fureidis; but long before the youth reappeared to report only partial success in the recovery of his master's property, the faithful Arabian horse had made its way back to El Fureidis, had recognized the Englishman, had rubbed its graceful head against his shoulder, and with coaxing eye entreated to be taken once more into his service.

A somewhat heavily-built nag served the turn of M. Trefoil, whose habit had never made a good horseman, and who loved a sober steed. The good man's breath came short, and his otherwise voluble tongue was effectually silenced by the jolting exercise of the road, except as he occasionally gathered voice for an anxious inquiry or a sudden expression of alarm, caused by the difficulties of the path; but Meredith's experience and encouragement came constantly to his aid, and the courage and endurance which had flagged in the onset gained strength as he proceeded.

Nothing could have been in greater contrast to the corpulent figure and timid horsemanship of M. Trefoil, than the erect and dignified posture of M. Lapierre, who rode with the easy grace of an ancient cavalry officer, reining in a fractious

horse with one hand, while with the other he pointed out to Havilah the most striking features of the prospect.

Havilah's attention was divided between the conversation of M. Lapierre and anxiety for her father, while at intervals her mind was abstracted from both by the necessity of soothing and checking her spirited gray mare, the same which had been Meredith's legacy to her on leaving El Fureidis, and which now, curvetting and frisking like a young colt, continually strove to break from the line of march, shaking its silken mane, curling its nostrils disdainfully, and casting from its chestnut eye an oblique intelligent glance at its mistress, which seemed to say, "this is tedious business for you and me, pretty one."

Geita, who had pleaded hard for the indulgence of a visit to the eastern capital, and had boasted of her ability to endure fatigue, began to droop in the saddle. She had assumed not a few coquettish airs on bidding adieu to her fellow-servants, but either her spirits had become exhausted with travel, or this once vagabond child of a Turkish janizary already missed the society of Bachmet, over whom, in virtue of her Osmanli parentage, she was accustomed to exercise a species of petty tyranny equally agreeable to both parties.

Meredith's travelling accoutrements brought up the rear of the mountain caravan. It consisted, independently of Abdoul, of three armed men, and twice that number of horses. The men were Arabs, stragglers of Sheik Zanadeen's tribe, and associates of Abdoul, in company with whom they had recently come to El Fureidis. They were wild, ill-visaged fellows, but expert riders, and glad for a trifling compensation to engage in the service of the Frank, and take charge of the pack-horses; the latter having been found indispensable for the transportation of those luxuries of eastern travel which Meredith's experience had proved necessary, and the deficiency of which in the provisioning of the party he had foreseen and guarded against.

Abdoul, nominal guide and dragoman of the expedition, came last of all. His services for the time superseded by

those of the skilful mountaineers of the district, he was at liberty to manifest that dogged indifference which well became his humour. He seemed, indeed, to have infused his sulkiness into the Khádhere, which hung her head, and trailed along with slow unwilling pace, as if reluctant to engage in the proposed enterprise, or accept the companionship forced upon her.

For more than three hours the travellers pursued a north-easterly direction, the road a mere mountain goat-track, and the heat of the sun — for it was now the month of May — becoming towards midday blinding and oppressive. Their first destination was Kubb Elias, at which point they were to strike the route of the semi-weekly post from Beyrout to Damascus.

A morning's ride across the highlands of the Lebanon is sufficient to weary the sturdiest horseman, and it was with no little satisfaction that our party, on gaining an elevated point, beheld at a little distance an old ruinous castle and a flowing stream of water, both of which were landmarks to the adjacent village. An easy and quick descent brought the cavalcade to the desired halting-place. Soon horses were picketed, luncheon baskets unpacked, and beside the clear stream, beneath a grove of spreading poplars, the tired company found rest, refreshment, and shade.

They had now gained the borders of the fertile plain of the Bekaa, luxuriant in verdure and grain-crops. Mejdél, at which place they proposed encamping for the night, was visible in the distance. A journey of some hours intervened, but the road was level, the ride easy, and the temptation to linger in the pleasant gardens of Kubb Elias irresistible. It was not until long after noon, therefore, that the party were again in the saddle.

The nature of the route no longer compelled them to move in single file, as had been the case during the morning. They preserved scarcely less uniformity, however, in their grouping, Meredith still maintaining a close proximity to M. Trefoil, and seeming wholly engrossed with his society. Havild

whose gray mare had learned to subdue her paces, riding leisurely between M. Lapierre and Abdoul. The morose mood of the latter had been sensibly ameliorated by Havilah's considerate kindness, and his taciturnity had yielded to the efforts of M. Lapierre, who, pitying the youth's isolated position in the company, had beckoned him alongside, and contrived to make him a partner in the conversation, which, as it turned chiefly upon localities and routes, was one in which the desert rover was well fitted to have a part.

An hour and a half of steady riding brought our travellers to a branch of the Litany, which coursed lazily through the plain. They crossed it by means of a modern-built bridge, journeyed on through fields of wheat and barley for a couple of hours more, and just at sunset gained the village which was their destination for the night. It was an unpromising place, made hideous by the poverty and filth of its inhabitants, the vermin that overran their houses, and the barking of inhospitable dogs.

M. Trefoil's heavy-built horse had flagged considerably towards the latter end of the day's journey, leaving his rider and the faithful Englishman a little in the rear of their party. By the time they gained the village, M. Lapierre, Abdoul, and the attendant muleteers had dismounted, and were surrounded by a swarm of peasants, all of whom were eager to make over the discomforts of their dwellings to the well-accounted travellers.

"Do not alight, I beg of you," said Meredith, to Havilah, who still remained in the saddle, reluctant to commit herself to the tender mercies of some wrinkled hags who were beckoning to her from the low doorways. "There is no tolerable place of shelter here. I am confident we can manage better for ourselves;" and springing from his horse he approached Father Lapierre, and addressed to him a few eager words. *M. Lapierre* listened attentively, following the direction of *Meredith's* finger, which pointed to a picturesque ruin on a hill at a little distance. Abdoul was then reluctantly drawn *unto the counsel*; a low decisive word was whispered in the ear.

of M. Trefoil, signs were made to the muleteers, and in an instant all had remounted. Meredith had grasped the bridle of Havilah's mare, which had become restive in the confusion, and the whole party had galloped off in the direction of the ruined temple, followed by the howls of the infuriated dogs and the hooting of the disappointed peasantry.

Among other cumbrous articles of convenience, Meredith had not neglected to bring with him his travelling tents. The process of encamping is usually in the East noisy and confused, but the skill of Abdoul and the resolute energy of Meredith had reduced it to a system, so that to choose a spot, unload the mules, and erect the temporary lodging, involved scarcely more time or trouble than that employed by the host of an English inn in arranging a guest-room for the squire of a neighbouring parish.

While active preparations for the night are going forward beneath the shadow of the ancient temple, and M. Trefoil has seated himself to watch the proceedings, we will follow M. Lapierre, Meredith, and Havilah, who are improving the half-hour of twilight by inspecting the interesting ruin, which, situated on the summit of a little hill overlooking Mejdél, challenges the curiosity of the traveller.

"This, then, is a remnant of ancient Chalcis," said Meredith, in a musing tone, as his eye wandered from the imposing masonry of the temple walls to the graceful Ionic columns half over-grown with ivy which lay scattered in every direction. "And these massive monoliths and broken shafts are specimens of an architecture even more remote than that of Baalbec and Palmyra."

"You are right in respect to time, though not strictly so in point of locality," answered M. Lapierre. "This is doubtless the ruin of a structure erected by some prince of Chalcis, and its site is included in the rich province of which the city was the capital; but look yonder," and M. Lapierre pointed to a few blackened heaps scarcely distinguishable in the distance; "there to the northeast of us, almost overlaid with rubbish and vegetation, are the sole remains of a city or

which Ptolemies and Herods have been proud to bear sway. Two or three miserable hovels with their wretched occupants now represent the wealth and royalty of an almost forgotten past."

"But Nature was never more royal than now," exclaimed Havilah. "Hermon is still a king; see how his diadem glistens in the western sunlight! see how all over the plain the waving grain bends to do him homage!"

"The foundations of the everlasting hills cannot be removed," said Father Lapierre, impressively. "Hermon has witnessed the rise and fall of many dynasties. The great ages do the bidding of the Lord: the mountains are his silent watchmen. Another cycle of God's providence has nearly run its course in this land; but Hermon looks calmly on, as if conscious of the almighty hand which, when it has reaped its harvest, will delay not to sweep the stubble from the soil."

"You speak of the power of Ottoman misrule," said Meredith.

"I do. It needs no prophetic eye to see that this age is ripe, and that Syria is soon destined to be rid of her tyrant. I look confidently forward to the time when men shall cease to curse the land which God has blessed, when commerce shall flourish on our shores, agriculture disclose the teeming wealth of the soil, and Christianity flourish in the land of its nativity."

"You believe, then, in a national progress, of which there are as yet but faint indications," remarked Meredith. "I must confess that during my sojourn in the land nothing has impressed me so forcibly as the primitive usages of the people, and their neglect of the natural opportunities which the country affords. The village where you and M. Trefoil have laboured so successfully is one of those few exceptions, which prove rather than contradict the general rule."

"True, my son; but you must remember that Syria has been trampled on for centuries by a succession of tyrants. The present government is a mere system of bribery and

exaction. No country can develop inwardly so long as she is the victim of foreign oppression. But the present state of things cannot continue; the age is a stirring and an eventful one. Already men's eyes are turned upon us; western Europe and enterprising America are emulating each other in their beneficent labours in this direction. Science is sounding our harbours, calculating the height of our mountains, surveying our wildernesses, and taking the measure of our streams, and religion lends her aid and sanction to the work, for a faithful band of Christian missionaries are in the van of the reforming army. Asia, until now a jealous recluse, is flinging open her doors to the stranger, Syria is the key to the whole continent, and who can question that the Son of the West will make for himself a highway through her deserts! Ignorance and tyranny must stand aside at his coming; the oppressor shall then be dethroned. God stands at the helm, and holds the nations in the hollow of his hand. He will remove the diadem, and take off the crown, and exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. He will overturn, overturn, overturn, until he come whose right it is. Even in the desolation around me," continued the old man, with the enthusiasm of one inspired by his subject, "I see the foundation of future prosperity; this land, deeply furrowed by the plough of disaster, is to me a rich soil, beneath which a seed of promise is ready to sprout and thrive. But you have not watched our present crumbling institutions as I have, Mr. Meredith; nor calculated the innate resources of our country. I can scarcely expect you to share my faith in Syria."

"Perhaps not," replied Meredith, thoughtfully, "for faith comes by knowledge, and my faith, I confess, is but partial. I can see destruction," and he stretched out both hands as if to embrace the surrounding prospect, "but where is the harvest? One need not go far to encounter ruin, but to the fruits of it I acknowledge I am blind."

"Nevertheless, it is a law of God's providence," said *Father Lapierre*, "that the ruin of the old shall serve as a foundation for the new. That prostrate wall," and he pointed

to a gigantic layer of stones, "may yet prove material for another generation's use, these massive columns may grace the portal to some nobler structure. Remember, my son, that the fairest temple the world ever knew was stricken for man's offences to become the chief corner-stone of the Church on earth, and this sacrifice was a type of what has been and shall be to the end of time — the outward perisheth, but the inward is renewed day by day."

"Yes, day by day," mused Meredith aloud; "gradually, imperceptibly, as if to test our faith. Destruction cometh like a whirlwind — the repair is slow. Syria has long been a waste, but I trust there is an unfulfilled promise for her still. God and his servants hasten on the day, for indeed she is a goodly land."

The short twilight had nearly faded away, the crest of Hermon alone glistened with the last purple rays, stars had shot out all over the sky, brilliantly beautiful as stars of the Orient alone can be, the plain shimmered in their radiance like a swelling sea, the mounds that dot its surface reared themselves like islands on the deep, the figures mounted on the ruinous moulding of the temple wall were dimly visible even to one another. The whole scene was grand, illusive, shadowy. It favoured meditation, and the thoughts of all soared awhile on the wings of silence, a silence which was suddenly broken by a voice just behind the group saying, in an earnest tone, "Sing, Havilah, sing; it is the hour."

Havilah turned her head slightly, saw her father, who had noiselessly climbed the wall, and responding at once to his request, sang sweetly and without hesitation.

"Through night to light! And though to mortal eyes
Creation's face a pall of horror wear,
Good cheer! good cheer! the gloom of midnight flies;
Then shall a sunrise follow, mild and fair.

"Through storm to calm! And though his thunder-car
The rumbling tempest drive through earth and sky,
Good cheer! good cheer! The elemental war
Tells that a blessed healing hour is nigh.



"Through cross to crown! And though thy spirit's life
Trials untold assail with giant's strength,
Good cheer! good cheer! Soon ends the bitter strife,
And thou shalt reign in peace with Christ at length.

"Through woe to joy! And though at morn thou weep,
And though the midnight find thee weeping still,
Good cheer! good cheer! The Shepherd loves his sheep;
Resign them to the watchful Father's will."

The effect of the song was at once solemn and inspiring. It was as if they had been at worship in the temple, and the service was ended. All now turned to depart.

M. Trefoil stumbled slightly among the loose stones, and M. Lapiere, who was nearest him, proffered a supporting arm. Havilah still stood upon the wall. Meredith held out his hand to assist her descent. She needed no such aid, but nevertheless accepted the courtesy, and they returned to the tent.

"Thank you," said Meredith, "for my share in your music. The pure in heart have visions, and see prophesies amidst the clouds which wrap grosser senses in darkness. Bless you, for your song of promise and cheer. The mind may grope among doubts and fears, but harmonies touch the soul."

"Because they are true," said Havilah.

"You are right," responded Meredith, meditatively. "Truth is an inspiration and a harmony. Falsehood only is a discord. Ah!" he exclaimed, stopping short and looking anxiously, "ah, Havilah, what made you start so?"

"A sudden fear!" said Havilah, hastily; "it is past," she added, with forced calmness of tone, but trembling visibly.

She had caught sight of two panther-like eyes glaring out from a hollow in the rocks. Wild beasts often prowl among the deserted ruins of Syria, and for a moment she believed such a one about to spring upon her. But with the next glance she had recognized Abdoul crouching like a beast in his lair, and evidently playing the spy.

Her first cause of alarm was dissipated, it is true, to be succeeded by another scarcely less appalling, as she detected the savage, fiery leer with which the boy's eyes were fastened, not upon herself, but her companion.

"Something startled you. You were not alarmed without cause," said Meredith, pausing to look about him. He saw nothing, however.

"It is so dark here," suggested Havilah, "one imagines strange things in the dark;" and she made a movement to hurry on.

"Yes, and your nerves have been tried too much of late. Besides, it is growing cold. The tent fire will be welcome, let us hasten in;" and drawing her cloak around her, and placing her hand within his arm, he conducted her with kind, almost brotherly tenderness to a small tent pitched without the ruins, and intended for her own and Geita's accommodation.

"What could she have seen or fancied?" he said to himself as he retraced his steps among the ruins, and sought diligently for some object of alarm; but the place was by this time deserted, and after a fruitless examination he returned to his own tent, where supper was spread, and Abdoul was innocently occupied in preparing coffee.

Dawn the next morning found M. Trefoil on the alert. Exercise and fresh air were already invigorating him; his wonted activity was to some degree restored. He felt himself the responsible leader of a company, and with officious zeal hurried about the little encampment, exhorting all to be in readiness for an early start. The advice was seasonable, for the day promised to be warm. No time, therefore, was lost, and after a hasty breakfast, which consisted merely of the remnants of last night's repast, the majority of the party mounted, and set forth under the guidance of M. Trefoil's Syrian attendants, Abdoul and the men of his tribe, being *left to strike the tents and follow.*

For an hour the road lay between gently sloping hills, densely shaded with oak and hawthorn, then across a dreary,

ill-cultivated plain, overshadowed by a rugged mountain-range. At the further extremity of this plain the little cavalcade halted to await the arrival of Abdoul and Meredith's men, being anxious to muster in full force before entering Wady el Kum (valley of the Flora), a narrow pass haunted by lawless bandits, and associated with many a deed of blood.

"Would it not be prudent to send Abdoul on in advance," questioned Havilah, glancing down the dark, tortuous windings of the glen, then shuddering slightly as she watched the rapid approach of the Arab horsemen, whose sinister faces and black elf-locks fluttering in the breeze, imparted to them a forbidding appearance. "Abdoul has a keen scent of danger, and knows the way perfectly," she added, as if anxious to apologize for a proposition which seemed uncalled for.

The remark was addressed to Father Lapierre, though intended for Meredith, to whom it was equally audible.

"There is no possibility of mistaking the path," said M. Lapierre, decidedly. "We have only to follow the bed of the torrent at the bottom of the ravine, and there are too many elements of safety in our party for us to dread a lurking enemy."

Meredith said nothing, but he marked the disturbance evinced in Havilah's features. He could not account for the fears of one usually so courageous, but he had a chivalrous respect for them nevertheless. "Take the lead, Abdoul," was his somewhat imperious command to the youth, who, as the company filed off, showed a disposition to linger in the rear. The boy gave an angry look at his master, a searching one at Havilah, then sulkily obeyed the mandate.

Havilah's undefined fears were relieved as she thus saw all communication cut off between the young chief and the men of his tribe, who, with their pack-horses, were destined to bring up the line; she had no dread of the ordinary perils which have given an ill-repute to Wady el Kum.

It was nevertheless a place to test the travellers' courage. M. Trefoil counselled rapid riding. M. Lapierre's keen eye

peered a little anxiously within the thick copsewood which lined the narrow pass. Meredith cocked his pistols, and kept as close to Havilah as the nature of the ground would permit.

This critical part of their route, however, was compassed without any other adventure or cause of alarm than the momentary trepidation occasioned by Geita, who, when about midway in the pass, startled the whole party by a succession of shrieks, and the positive declaration that she saw men prowling on the heights above, and heard the report of a rifle. As the expected assailants proved to be a couple of majestic eagles standing with folded wings on a lofty cliff, and the concussion of a bursting water-bottle on the back of one of the mules had been magnified into a musket-shot, the incident served on the whole to place even reasonable apprehensions in a grotesque light, and resolve possible peril into absurdity.

After issuing from the glen, an hour's moderate riding brought our travellers to a fine spring beside a ruined khan. Here they halted awhile, more for the refreshment of the horses than their riders, for the place was uninviting, and the khan afforded no shelter from the sun. It was therefore voted that they should press on as rapidly as possible, in the hope of reaching Damascus before sun-down. The route was for the most part dreary, stretching between barren hills, then opening on an extensive plateau wholly destitute of verdure. The view embraced nearly one hundred square miles, yet there was not a tree nor shrub to break the dull uniformity. Even the group of hills dimly seen in the distance chilled the senses with their cold, bare outline. The ground beneath the horses' feet was hard and flint-strewn. Anywhere but in the East the scene would have been hopelessly forlorn. But in Syria, land of contrasts, let the traveller never despair. A sudden break in the hard-featured landscape, an unforeseen descent, a plunge into the heart of this *stony creation*, and behold the change! A parched soil, a *scorching sun*, a Sahara of desolation has given place to *verdure, fragrance, cool shade, and sparkling rills*. Through *the midst of the dell flows the Barada, the ancient Abana,*

famed river of Damascus. Little villages are embowered on its banks, embracing on either side the beneficent and life-giving stream which hastens lovingly on, defying obstacles.

Follow up the ravine awhile, cross the river by a substantial bridge, wind through pleasant village gardens, then strike boldly up the naked white cliffs beyond. Behind you lies the desert, intersected by Abana, with her thread of green; press on through a rock-hewn path, mount patiently to the height of land, and pause not until at the summit, you gain a little domed wely, or shrine, landmark of the traveller.

Before you is spread Damascus, "the diamond of the desert," the "pearl of the Orient," the "perennial city." You stand where Mahomet stood, when he gazed upon the fairest spot on earth, then heroically turned his back upon it, exclaiming, "There is but one Paradise for the faithful, and I will not have mine below."

You behold the glittering white domed capitol, sitting among her gardens, a garlanded queen, while the golden Abana, her monarch and her mate, pours boundless wealth into her lap. You may go the world over. You will never see a more enrapturing vision.

Drawn up in file beside the little wely, our travellers lingered on the brow of the cliff, loth by speech or movement to break the spell which bound them to the spot. It has been well said, that nothing less than a city of "palaces whose walls are marble, and whose doors are ivory and pearl, could keep up the enchantment of that distant view." No wonder, then, that imagination shrinks from the near reality.

There was a motive, moreover, for delay on the part of M. Trefoil and his party. Abdoul had been sent forward an hour ago, to announce to Mustapha Osman the arrival of his guests; and consistently with Eastern custom, it was no more than reasonable to expect that Mustapha, or some delegate of his household, should ride forth and meet the strangers at the *city gates*.

Nor was the anticipation disappointed; long before the eager eyes of his companions were satisfied with gazing

M. Trefoil, in whom the sentiment of friendship superseded the love of the beautiful, and who had been eagerly scanning the direct approach to the city, proclaimed in a tone of exhilaration that he could distinguish Mustapha and a band of followers, just emerging through one of the principal gateways. This announcement was listened to at first with incredulity, but as the well-mounted troops drew nearer, and the white mare and flame-coloured robe of Abdoul figured conspicuously among the Turkish escort, all doubts as to the identity of the parties were dispelled, and encouraging their weary horses to one last brisk gallop, the little cavalcade, with M. Trefoil at their head, made a rapid descent into the plain.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The Inner Court.

M. TREFOIL had in his eagerness deceived himself as to the identity of his friend Mustapha. The venerable Turk, who rode conspicuously in front of the approaching troop, was not the merchant, but his major-domo and representative, who had been commanded to sally forth and meet the travellers; his master, meanwhile, preparing to receive and welcome them in due state at his own portal. The ambassador of the rich Damascene was no mean personage, however. A turban of gigantic dimensions, a gray beard of proportionate volume, a richly flowered pelisse, and an elaborately caparisoned horse combined to render his person distinguished; while a solemn countenance and ludicrously majestic demeanour proclaimed the dignity of his office. He was attended by a couple of Abyssinian slaves and a native interpreter; the latter had been despatched as a special bearer of hospitable entreaties to his excellency, the English milord, whose arrival in the company M. Trefoil had not failed to announce to his friend, and who was presumed by the latter to be ignorant of the Turkish tongue; the only language the major-domo had at command.

Meredith, who had not dreamed of intruding upon the hospitalities of Mustapha, politely evaded the solicitations of the interpreter, but his English objections and scruples were finally overruled by the Turkish master of ceremonies, who, discovering his excellency's familiarity with the Osmanli language, gravely assured him that the dwelling of Mustapha Osman was the dwelling of his excellency; that if its ways were not sufficiently wide, Mustapha Osman would himself seek lodgings elsewhere; but that it would be derogatory to the dignity of the Turkish Effendi that the friend of his friends should be dependent on the hospitality of a hireling.

The matter being set in this light, Meredith, who had now become versed in Eastern etiquette, realized the necessity of yielding with a good grace without further parleying; he therefore dismissed Abdoul and the other Bedouin attendants, consigned the pack-horses and baggage to their charge, reserving only his leather portmanteau, which was transferred to one of M. Trefoil's mules; and with a retinue thus sensibly diminished, the travellers entered the city gate, and took the direction to the house of Mustapha.

The approach to Damascus had wound through beautiful gardens and fragrant orchards. The fine old Roman portal which furnished admittance within the walls gave promise of grand architectural effects. The moment the narrow, dark, and dirty streets were gained, however, the illusion vanished. It was now nearly nightfall: as the party threaded one tortuous alley after another, filing between rows of dilapidated buildings, overhanging projections, and distorted piles of masonry, they all experienced that sudden depression of spirit consequent upon a close atmosphere, uncertain lights and shadows, and the sense of prisonlike isolation which one feels on finding himself encompassed by the windowless exterior walls of Eastern dwellings. Here a line of loaded camels blocked up the passage; there a pack of lean dogs were snarling over a bone; otherwise the gutterlike streets were wellnigh deserted.

Meredith looked from right to left with an astonished
El Fureidis.

not unmingled with disgust. "Fancy and romance have bestowed many poetical names upon Damascus," he remarked to M. Lapierre, who rode beside him. "I should add to them one more, and style it 'The Desert Mirage.' Can it be possible that this is the fairy city which we saw yonder?"

"Truly so," answered Father Lapierre. "But you forget that the East is the land of enchantment. A genuine Oriental soon learns to calm his transports, whether of pleasure or of pain. His philosophy and his experience teach him that distance and proximity are alike illusive. The former does not deceive him, nor the latter discourage. The feeble fortunes of Prince Aladdin, the fabled hero of youth, were, you remember, but a dream; still they foreshadowed the experiences of many an imaginative traveller. Patience is the true genius of Eastern climes; trust to it in the present instance, and I scarcely think you will be disappointed."

"Will it convert this old plaster tenement into a palace for me, think you, good father?" said Meredith, glancing upward at an ugly conglomeration of wood and clay, beneath which they were passing.

"Perhaps so; we will see," replied Father Lapierre, meaningly; and as he spoke, Meredith observed that their escort had halted in front of the plain, Saracenic archway, which alone interrupted the uniformity of the bare white surface wall; the Turkish major-domo had alighted, and was holding the bridle of M. Trefoil's horse, while one of the Abyssinian slaves was assisting the clumsy rider to dismount. In a moment more a horse-block covered with crimson velvet was brought forward for the use of Havilah and Geita; and the chief dignitary of the establishment was at Meredith's side, saying, with stately ceremony, his hand meanwhile on his heart, "Behold the dwelling of my master, the Effendi; will it please your excellency to alight, and honour by your presence the salamlik of Mustapha Osman?"

"*Blessed be Allah who has conducted you hither in safety, O my brother!*" said the Turkish merchant, as presenting himself at the doorway, he received Mr. Trefoil with a

fraternal embrace. "Welcome and salutation to thee, O fair rose of Lebanon!" he continued, addressing himself to Havilah, and bending low as if about to kiss the hem of her garment. She frankly offered her hand, which the venerable Moslem touched reverentially with his lips.

Meredith meanwhile took an observation of his host. He was not a large man, but there was a staid majesty in his carriage, which rendered his presence and even his figure imposing. He borrowed no dignity from his dress, except as the spotlessness of his white turban and the sober tints of his pelisse harmonized with the repose and the solemnity of his features; and if richness of costume had furnished the test of rank, the major-domo might have been mistaken for the master, the master for the major-domo; but independently of that Eastern ceremonial which instantly marks and determines each man's grade in the social scale, there was that in the countenance and air of Mustapha, which gave unmistakable evidence of superiority. The stately gravity of the major-domo was partly constitutional, partly assumed; that of his master was the result of a thoughtful wisdom; the former was proud in virtue of his office, the latter was severe in his own simple self-respect. The extreme melancholy of the Effendi's mild blue eye was tempered by its kindly expression; the grave, firm lines about his mouth indicated benevolence, no less than strength of will. His whole countenance evinced that calm determination which makes cowards shrink and base men tremble, but which the weak and the dependent learn to lean upon, and friends and equals trust instinctively.

Meredith conceived a friendship and admiration for Mustapha at a glance, a sentiment which was to some degree responded to by the Moslem, who greeted the Englishman at first by a distant salaam, then, as if reading a recommendation in his face, advanced and cordially offered a welcoming hand saying, in a tone of perfect sincerity, "Our nations are allies, O servant of the great queen. My brother is thy friend. Let Mustapha then be thy brother."

Meredith responded with the frankness of an Englishman

agreeably tinctured with that oriental grace of diction which had become familiar to him. Mustapha now caught sight of M. Lapierre, who was in the act of dismounting. Advancing to meet him, the merchant exclaimed, "Praise be to Allah who has sent thee hither, O mighty man of healing! I have begged assistance of God with patience and prayer, and He has heard me, for God is with the patient. My dwelling is thine, O worthy physician, and I am thy grateful servant." He then waved his hand, and preceded his guests through the narrow passage which conducted to the outer court or reception room of his dwelling. As they emerged from the dark and winding entrance-way into the marble-paved hall, where fresh air, sweet perfumes, and the sound of rippling water greeted their weary senses, Meredith began to experience the dawning of a new vision of enchantment. It was but the dawn, however; a mere foreshadowing of what awaited him. It was now nearly dark. Only a feeble glimmer of light lingered in the apartment, revealing the black and white blocks of the pavement, the spray of a central fountain, and the uncertain outlines of the tall orange and pomegranate trees which threw the corners of the court into deep shadow. Servants with noiseless tread were moving in different directions, marshalling the attendants of the travellers to their quarters, or transferring the luggage to its appropriate destination, performing these offices with that dumb rapidity which makes all the operations of a Turkish household seem the effect of magic. To one accustomed to the noise and bustle which ordinarily attends an arrival, there was something bewildering in the stillness and harmonious regularity of this reception. A single gesture on the part of the master served for the issuing of his orders; a fluttering of white veils at the further extremity of the court announced the vicinity of Maysunah and her attendants; a profound obeisance on the part of a swarthy Abyssinian, and Havilah and Geita disappeared, wafted away as if on the breath of a perfume. Mustapha *waved his hand* to his friends, who, by some unconscious *process, found themselves* stretched on the wide divan that

ran around the room. Then, with the humility of an inferior addressing dignitaries, the host asked his guests' permission to order coffee and pipes.

Had he asked leave to order pistols and poison, Meredith would unhesitatingly have assented, so completely had he already become subjected to the influence of the place. M. Lapierre was weary, and could hardly resist the impulse to enjoy the opportunity for immediate rest. But the active temperament of M. Trefoil was not so impressible to the soothing and slumberous effects of an oriental reception. He knew his own wants, and felt completely at home. So, in the name of himself and the others of the party, he promptly declined any other refreshment for the present than clean linen and a bath, these being, as he declared, the chief luxury after a journey.

With the composure of one whose chosen duty it is to wait and serve, Mustapha at once issued orders in conformity with M. Trefoil's suggestion, and almost before the customary and mutual inquiries had been interchanged regarding the health and welfare of the Damascene and his guests, the latter were gravely summoned to take possession of the bath and its luxurious appliances.

"I shall have the honour of supping with you in the inner court," said Mustapha, rising from his seat, and politely attending his friends to the door, where he saluted each as they passed through.

The solemn mysteries of the bath had been complied with, the ecstatic sense of repose had supervened. Transported almost without conscious volition to the superb inner court, the deserted harem of the widowed host, who, despite the licence of his creed, was still true to the memory of the lost Fatimah, the male members of M. Trefoil's party had feasted on viands of aromatic odour, and been soothed by the drink which the Arabic poet styles in his extravagance "the beverage of the people of God." The velvet-shod servants had advanced and retreated with as much precision as if to the sound of music, the hands of the guests had been dipped in

rose water, then folded in snowy napkins embroidered with gold, graceful pipe-bearers dropping on one knee had presented the jewelled mouthpieces within reach of the lips, and the elysium of the Oriental was attained.

The elysium of Father Lapierre, however, was duty, moderation, and healthful rest. He had eaten sparingly, declined coffee and the narghileh, and withdrawn for the night. Meredith had complied with the suggestion of his host, and taken possession of the divan of a curtained alcove that opened upon the court. M. Trefoil and Mustapha Osman, reclining upon the dais of the central apartment, where supper had been served to them dish by dish, were engaged in friendly converse. But the Turk never wastes words; the manufacturer was weary, and the dialogue was desultory, dreamy, and slow. Soothed by its monotony, by the rippling play of numerous fountains, and by the indistinct sound of distant music, Meredith fell asleep. He slept awhile a dreamless sleep, then he awoke and dreamed.

He dreamed that M. Trefoil and the Effendi were gone, and that he was alone in the enchanted palace, which Eastern genii, subject to the will of Mustapha, had decorated for Fatimah, the merchant's youthful and beloved bride. From the canopied alcove where he lay, he looked up at a domed ceiling, whose azure tint was relieved by panelling of gorgeous arabesque, draped with a fretwork of gold. A gilded cornice, with delicately carved pendants, ran around the walls of the court, which was divided into an upper and lower apartment, connected together by a noble archway. From the former branched off various alcoves and recesses similar to that on whose cushioned divans the Englishman was reposing. As his eye ranged up and down the lofty walls, he felt himself lost amid mazes of colouring, and bewildered by architectural forms. Arches with fluted pillars, niches from which streamed a subdued light, slabs of marble and porphyry, on which inscriptions from the Koran were engraved in graceful Arabic characters, light galleries and colonnades festooned with the *passion-flower* and jessamine in full bloom; all these elements

of beauty assailed his senses at a glance, and reflected in innumerable little mirrors inserted in the wainscoting, were repeated in endless perspective. In vain did the imagination attempt to trace the pattern of the flowers and scrolls which were woven in gold on the rich satin of the divans, or to evolve the designs of variegated marble which constituted the mosaic pavement. It was enough to gaze in dreamy wonder, sunk in an apathy of oriental delights. Nor was the eye alone filled and satisfied. Numerous fountains, emptying themselves into a central basin, diffused coolness through the atmosphere; tropical plants, grouped at the angles of the walls, scattered intoxicating odours, and a bird, a nightingale perchance, uttered melodious music.

Was it the rippling of a new fountain just starting into play which now chimed in with the other sounds, or was it the light patter of youthful feet? was it the answering note of the bird's mate which now met the Englishman's ear, or was it girlish laughter? was it a picture such as artists never painted before, or was it a living ideal which had come to perfect the scene?

He looked in the direction whence the sounds proceeded, but saw nothing. Opposite to him, however, mirrored in glass, or possibly in fancy, were two figures, whose loveliness, grace, and picturesque attire harmonized so perfectly with their fairy-like surroundings that they seemed an indispensable part of the whole. They were not mere models of form and colouring, for they were endued with life and motion. Now they paced slowly along the railed gallery which ran around the court, then paused to pluck a passion-flower or smell a rose, then idled on. Meredith watched them breathlessly for a moment; then they were gone.

With a sudden sense of loss he looked vacantly around him, and as suddenly they reappeared. It was a narrow strip of mirror set in an angle of the alcove which revealed them now, and this time Meredith knew that he saw *only the reflection of objects*, distant or near he could not tell. He

almost felt in honour bound to flee, but whither and in what direction, and why flee from a dream?

They were descending a winding staircase, whose balusters, wreathed with the gilded foliage of art, and the green twigs of creeping vines, half concealed their figures. The one was glowing in the radiance of healthful bloom; the soft richness of the Indian, the pure element of the Greek, the nervous fibre of the Anglo-Saxon race, all revealed themselves in her lineaments and motions. She bore herself with that careless ease, half child-like and half queenly, which was her mountain birthright; she looked around her with the naïve curiosity of a nature which, untainted by envy or selfish craving, feels that all the treasures of earth and heaven are hers in fee simple through her power to enjoy.

The vivid colours of her striped Persian skirt, her Zouave jacket, and her velvet cap, contrasted strongly with the deep but softly blended hues of the frescoes and mosaics which lined the apartment; her rich complexion and lustrous eyes seemed to make the scene luminous with her presence, too luminous but for the sweet feminine grace which subdued and sanctified it.

Her companion was diminutive, feeble, and pale. Her dim blue eye had that faded aspect which we might expect to see in one who had been long imprisoned from the light. Her hair, of the lifeless colour of desert sand, was so thin as barely to cover her temples, far less to shadow her high, strained, angular brow; her face would have been prematurely old, but for the sweet, infantile expression of the mouth, which, whether the lips were in motion or repose, always awakened tenderness by its beseeching, pathetic appeal. She seemed encumbered and oppressed by the richness and weight of her costume. The cumbrous folds of her pink satin trousers were disproportioned to her petite figure, and to the miniature feet which peeped from beneath them.

Her stiffly embroidered vest appeared to contract her narrow chest, her slender shoulders bent beneath her caftan of heavy Persian silk closely interwoven with gold. The string of

glittering trinkets and jewels bound around her head challenged pity for the frail wearer, and the taper fingers and blue-veined arms, which leaned on the stair-rail for support, looked more wan and wasted for the jewelled rings and bracelets which zoned them.

"Lean on me, Maysunah," said her stronger friend, drawing the feeble girl closer to her. Maysunah's head sank on the offered shoulder, and her low words of thanks, uttered in the melodious and modulated accent of her native tongue, were like a minor chord filling in the music of Havilah's pure contralto.

So, with loving attitude and words, these playmates of childhood, mutually happy in reunion, came down the stairway together, and crossed the marble-paved court. Lost once more to the Englishman's sight as they passed beyond the mirror's narrow scope, he only beheld them again as, gliding within a few feet of his sheltered alcove, they approached a heap of cushions just outside the margin of the fountain, and now when it was too late for him to retreat, he became conscious that the vision was no illusion, and that he beheld both maidens face to face.

"Rest here, my drooping lily, my panting dove," said Havilah, as seating herself amid the cushions, she pillowed Maysunah's head upon her lap. "We have wandered round the house too long. The mountain roe forgot that her mate had been reared within painted walls, and that her feet were not trained to run or to climb. So, so, lie still — ah! the sweet bird yonder! listen, Maysunah."

And Maysunah lay still and listened — but not long. Rest and song were less soothing to her than the face of her friend; and presently raising herself on one elbow, she looked up at Havilah, that she might drink in the refreshment of her smile, as the child who has found a long lost toy feasts his eye on the recovered treasure, and cannot suffer it out of his sight.

There are some flowers which, wanting in beauty, waite themselves in fragrance. Such was Maysunah. The deep

affectionateness of her nature exhaled with every breath. Undeveloped, unreasoning, untaught, she could only love. The lonely child, reared in the desolate harem which since her mother's death had been such only in name, had found nothing in her narrow experience to foster envy, vanity, or pride; never conscious of an outward want, but knowing no society save that of her grave father, and servants of like years, her heart alone had craved nourishment. Havilah's visit to Damascus four years ago had been the one living episode in her lifeless life. All her clinging memories twined round that solitary event, and the recoming of her mountain friend was like a breeze from Lebanon to a desert wayfarer.

Such guileless worship! such unaffected admiration as she bestowed upon Havilah! It actually made Havilah blush; but the blush melted into a smile when Maysunah, with unhesitating freedom, put up her hand to stroke her friend's temples, and feel the soft bloom on her cheek. It was an infantile token of love, and the smile which responded to it was a tender, compassionate smile, like that with which a mother receives a babe's caress. So too it was with wondering yet patient submission that Havilah watched the motions of the child maiden, as slowly unwinding the long strips of pearls which adorned her thin arms, she knelt beside her fairer companion, and with skilful fingers interweaved them with the black shining braids of hair which were looped beneath the mountain girl's Greek cap. And when the becoming toilette was completed, and Havilah saw herself reflected in the basin of the fountain, and acknowledged her friend's services with a kiss, Maysunah clasped her hands, and gazed with an ecstasy of satisfaction which almost lent a glow to her own dim eye and sunken cheek.

And she had achieved signal success. Meredith had almost forgotten that Havilah was so beautiful.

Penetrating beyond and behind those external charms ^{and} had first captivated his senses, learning something of Her ^{of} that spiritual life which constituted her inner *chest*, ^{and} had become less sensitively alive to that outward *Persian* ^{beauty}.

radiance which was but the reflection of a purer light, but now that she had burst suddenly upon his sight, like the central jewel of an oriental crown, he realized that, whether in palace or cot, alone with nature on sacred Lebanon, or decked with the earliest gems of Persia and of Lud, Havilah's loveliness could not be rivalled nor her lustre dimmed. It was the triumph of youth and beauty. It was to the Englishman what the loadstar is to the lost mariner, a sight to thrill the heart with sudden joy; but the emotion did not end here. As truth is better than beauty, as soul masters sense, as the mariner looks to his pole-star, then, cheered by its ray, plunges boldly into the darkness, so Meredith's throb of homage soon gave place to a resolute calm; a beam of holy light shone upon the night of his spirit, and the star which he worshipped became to him a guiding star.

"She speaks," said he to himself; "lie still, my heart, and listen."

"My dove is pining in its gilded cage," said Havilah, compassionately, as drawing Maysunah's head once more to her bosom, she observed the quick breath that betrayed the girl's feeble frame; "thou must go with me to my mountains, Maysunah; thou must sit beneath the fig-trees' shade, and drink the pure wine of our native vines, and smell the smell of Lebanon. That is the medicine that thou needst, my caged bird. O say then, wilt thou go?"

"I should like it," murmured Maysunah, thoughtfully, but without looking up.

"We will wander among old ruins," said Havilah, "and rest on flowery banks, and trace the shadows on the valleys, and watch the sun sink into the sea at nightfall. We will fling the muffling veil to the winds. The blue sky will not be jealous of thine eyes. We shall be free as the mountain breeze, Maysunah. Wilt thou go?"

"Ah! how sweet it were to go!" whispered Maysunah, pressing Havilah's hand.

"Thou shalt fly with me then, my tender fledgling," said Havilah. "The parent bird will not forbid. We will pro-

mise him that thine eye shall grow bright with health, and thy pale cheek bloom like the rose. Ah, how happy we will be together! I will sing to thee, and talk to thee, and cherish thee, my love. I will tell thee old stories of the past, such as the good father tells to me. Already I seem to be bidding thee welcome to my home, and my heart to bound with the thought, Maysunah, Maysunah is come!"

Warmed by her first impulse, her generous sympathy, Havilah's heart was truly a-glow, but no responsive hopes were awakened in Maysunah's breast. The latter slightly changing her position so as once more to command a view of Havilah's face, scanned her friend's mobile features with a sickly smile, then in slow, melancholy accents said "It cannot be. The bird whose wings have long been clipt has no strength to soar. I may not drink in health with the mountain breeze; I may not listen to thy stories or thy songs; I may not come to thy Lebanon home; but oh, Havilah!" and Maysunah, rising with a suddenness for which Havilah was wholly unprepared, threw herself on her knees, and half buried in the cushions, with hands clasped, and every feature of her white face strained with the intensity of her appeal, exclaimed "tell me, O tell me of Him who has said, let little children come unto me."

Startled by the plaintive, yearning cry, Havilah was silent for an instant; then answered, "Dost thou remember Him so well, Maysunah?"

"Remember him! Ah! how could I forget?" was the reply, uttered in tones at once passionate and childish. "Has He not been with me all these years? have I not found in Him, brother, sister, mother, friend? When Mustapha was absent on the weary pilgrimage, and Fatimah was in the arms of Asaad, and there was none to answer the child's lonely cry; O how then could she be deaf to the tender call, *'Maysunah, come unto me?'*"

"*And thou camest?*" asked Havilah.

"Ah, how could I come? and what could I do?" said Maysunah, with a mournful shake of the head. "He was my

treasure, but what was I? His voice has been to me like a song in the night, but I have had no power to answer: could Maysunah pay honour to Him who was a stranger to all else beside? Could the feeble one exalt the friend whom the rich and the strong hold in light esteem?"

"How wouldst thou exalt Him, and what honour wouldst thou pay?" questioned Havilah, with thoughtful interest.

"My father has engraved the commands of his prophet in letters of gold upon the wall," said Maysunah, pointing to the tablets above her head, on which the precepts of the Koran were inscribed. "He has performed the sacred pilgrimage to Mecca, and risked his life that he might kiss the blessed Kaaba. His balances in the day of reckoning will be found heavy with good works. He prayeth with face turned towards the holy shrine. He bestoweth his alms freely, seeking to attain by means of the wealth which God hath given him the future mansion of paradise. But I," she continued, in a sad, apologetic tone, as if humbled by a sense of the mortifying contrast, "I can raise no altar to my Lord, for I know not even where He lies entombed;" and her eyes wandered from side to side, like one amazed in a wilderness: "I have no riches to bestow upon his servants!" and she dropped her empty hands upon her lap. "I have no strength to labour in His cause, no power to add honour to his name, no offerings to lay at his feet. Poor, solitary, sinful child that I am, I have nothing to give Him but my heart;" and as she spoke, tears gushed from her eyes, and covering her face with her thin hands, she once more dropped her head upon Havilah's bosom.

"It is all He asks, it is all He asks, my precious one," said Havilah, folding her arms tightly around Maysunah, who was trembling with agitation. Havilah herself was deeply moved, and it was only after some minutes that she could compose herself sufficiently to add: "Be comforted, Maysunah, sweet sister in the Lord. Thou art his by the seal of thine own confession. Pet lamb of his flock. Oh, doubt not that the good Shepherd will take thee in his arms, and bear thee on his bosom."

"Lead me to Him! oh lead me to Him, Havilah!" said Maysunah between her sobs.

"I will," said Havilah; "the distance is not far. It is not hard to find and to follow the master that one loves, and thou lovest Him already."

"He first loved me," was the expressive response.

"And how knowest thou of his love?"

"Was I not with thee in the lovely fruit orchard beside the sacred Abana, when the old man called us from our play, and we knelt at his feet, and he laid his hand on our heads, and blessed us, and told us of Him who has said, Let little children come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven?"

"And was this all?"

"Yes, all; but it was much to Maysunah. The learned and the wise might trust to Mahommed the Meccan law-giver; but he had no welcome and no promise for a weak, ignorant child. Jesus called, and I answered. He spoke once only, but my heart answers still.

"And He hears thee, Maysunah."

"Ah, could I believe it!" said Maysunah, her features kindling at the thought. "But, Havilah, He knows me not. I hear his voice, but I cannot follow Him; He is near me, but I cannot see His face; He has passed by me, but I have only clung to the skirts of his robe, I have but kissed the hem of his garment."

"And so shalt thou be made perfectly whole," exclaimed Havilah with enthusiasm. "Poor, loving, and pleading soul, fear not but He will bind up all thy wounds."

"I ask no other healing," said Maysunah. "They have studied my disease in vain, for its root lies here;" and she laid her hand upon her heart. "They have given me vile drugs, but each was more bitter than the last; they have mixed for me cooling drinks, but I was fired still; they have sought to cheer me, but I drooped the more. And then when my father wept I cried 'there is balm for me in Lebanon, a spring *among the mountains* for which I thirst; an old man there *who alone can save Maysunah*. Send for him ere I die.'"

"Dear wanderer, long parched by the desert breath," said Havilah, "thou shalt thirst no more, for Jesus himself has promised that to them that are athirst He will give the water of life freely."

"I have wandered in the desert," said Maysunah, "but thou art my oasis. I have found thee at last, Havilah. Let me rest now beneath thy shade. Thou hast within thee the well-spring for which my spirit pants. Bathe me in its flood, my beautiful one. Tell me, as thou didst promise the stories that the good father has told to thee; but let them all be of Jesus, the heavenly one, the comforter."

She now composed herself into a listening attitude, folded her little hands meekly together, and lifted up her dim eyes as the scorched flower lifts its cup to the night dew.

And Havilah filled the thirsty cup to its brim, filled it gently, drop by drop, from her own crystal spring of truth, and child poured out to child the knowledge of that love which embraces all the families of the earth, which triumphs over sin and the grave, and which the humblest soul may purchase with a prayer.

And Maysunah drank the heavenly-draught, and the drooping soul felt the truth of the promise, "Thou shalt never thirst again. For the water that I shall give thee shall be within thee a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

And the Englishman, the once haughty-souled Englishman, what of him? How did he receive the truth which is mighty to save?

He listened as the child that is lost listens to the voice that calls him home; and when the voice had ceased, and his dream, if it were a dream, was over, he sank upon his knees, and there, under the roof of Mahommed's disciple, the man reared in a Christian land first bowed his proud spirit in a Christian's prayer, and laid the required gift on the altar of Him who had softly whispered to his soul that night, "My son, give me thy heart."

CHAPTER XXVII.

The Pearl of the Orient.

"Ah, my lazy friend! you should have been with us last evening at the cool café on the shady banks of the Barada," was M. Trefoil's morning salutation to Meredith; "I should have roused you from your cushioned slumbers yonder, and claimed your company in our excursion, but my friend here, to whom sleep is one of the paradises of the prophet, would not suffer you to be disturbed."

"It is an ungrateful office, O Effendi," said Mustapha, addressing himself to Meredith, "to rouse one from happy dreams. All pleasures have their season, and life is long enough for all. The clear river, the cool breezes, the fragrant gardens, are equally tempting every night, and the moon is young."

"Damascus is always here, my friend," exclaimed M. Trefoil, without giving Meredith an opportunity to reply; "but we cannot always be in Damascus. A few days' enjoyment of your hospitality, a glimpse at your famous mosques, temples, coffee-shops, and bazaars, is all we can hope for. There's no time, then, to be lost; and the first question, therefore, is how shall we employ to-day?"

"What says his excellency?" inquired Mustapha, again appealing to his English guest.

"Simply that I am at your disposal," replied Meredith. "Nothing could have been more welcome than last evening's repose, for which I thank you; but this morning I am ready and impatient for a nearer view of this enchanted city, which promises to fulfil all the fabulous visions I ever conceived of the Orient."

"If it suit your pleasure, then," said Mustapha, "we will devote the morning to the bazaars, and later in the day will adjourn to the shade of the more distant gardens and fruit-orchards."

All, including M. Lapierre, professed themselves satisfied with this arrangement, and M. Trefoil, having stipulated that his daughter and Maysunah should accompany them, the party soon sallied forth, the gentlemen threading the narrow crooked streets on foot, the ladies mounted on white Egyptian donkeys, and attended by well-dressed Abyssinian slaves. Meredith had no difficulty in recognizing the fragile figure of Maysunah, in spite of the jealous veil which partially concealed her form, and conformably with Turkish custom, wholly hid her face. Havilah, with intuitive deference to city etiquette, and the habits of the household in which she was a guest, carefully obscured her features behind the folds of her white izar, and Geita, who rode just behind her mistress, made a compromise between the dignity of her race and the coquetry of her nature by arranging her drapery of Syrian muslin in strict imitation of Maysunah's veil, but suffering it to drop, or become as it were displaced by accident whenever a street corner or crowded market-place afforded an opportunity of displaying her twinkling eyes or rosy lips to advantage.

Who has not heard of the Eastern bazaars? To whom is not the very word bazaar suggestive of all that imagination, luxury, and wealth can devise to tempt one to break the tenth commandment? And if the word itself be significant, how much more so when associated with that city of palaces and genii which, sitting alone between the desert and the mountains, has, "time out of mind," been receiving into its lap the costly treasures of countless caravans! To visit the Damascus bazaars is to wander hour after hour through interminable avenues of shopmen's stalls, from the rows of matted lobbies where inferior articles are sold, and the poorer class of customers welcomed, to the lofty, peak-roofed and vaulted emporiums of jewellery, silks, and precious fabrics of Persian manufacture, where the luxurious and richly dressed *merchant squats* on his cushion, quaffs his sherbet, puffs at his *narghileh*, and now and then condescends to recommend *wares* to some citizen pasha or wealthy Frank.

El Fweidis.

The latter especially claims his notice. No Mosaic decree binds the Moslem's conscience, or forbids him to covet the gold with which his imagination lines the pockets of every Englishman. Thus Meredith's European dress and cool indifference of manner instantly challenged the cupidity of the Damascene tradesmen. Scarcely had the group of sight-seers emerged from the obscure streets of the city into the brilliant squares of the market-place, than their ears were assailed by invitations and entreaties, couched, not in the harsh street cries of Western hucksters, but in the alluring poetic phrase of the Oriental.

"Odours that waft one to the realm of the blessed! Spices that steep the soul in visions of Araby! O Ingleez Effendi!" cries the vendor of sweet distillations and perfumes. "O food of the immortals! will his excellency pass you untasted by?" is the pathetic query with which the dealer in sweet-meats addresses the luscious delicacies spread out before him.

"Disdain not, O man of a sad countenance, the soul-soothing narghileh, whose tube will exhale thy melancholy, and whose amber mouthpiece will whisper to thee a song of the sea," is the exhortation of the pipe salesman. "Slippers for the feet of western hours! Bridles that will curb the fiery steed of El Hejaz! Jewels born to reflect eyes that we love!"—these, and similar insinuating appeals, issue in modulated accent from the mouths of the turbaned merchants, who, seated on cushions in the midst of their wares, rouse themselves to momentary effort, then, failing of a purchaser, sink into listlessness and apathy.

And all or nearly all were this day destined to disappointment, and forced to console themselves with the reflection. "It is the will of Allah." A few weeks ago, and the Englishman would have scattered his wealth with spendthrift liberality, and distributed his purchases with equal indifference; *but he had lately learned a better use for his gold, and the wants of a suffering community had admonished him to take an account of his stewardship.*

So the solicitations of the accomplished shopmen were un-

heeded, or acknowledged only by a smile. A few household articles purchased by Mustapha, some sugared fruits and tasteful ornaments which Maysunah hoped might be acceptable to Havilah, and some additions which Meredith made to his travelling accoutrement, constituted the disbursement of the party.

The entire morning, however, was consumed in perambulating this gay and picturesque portion of the city, which furnishes the realization of all our visions and dreams of oriental traffic. But only the pedestrians continued abroad until noon. Maysunah soon became weary, and the mounted portion of the company, with their attendants, turned their donkeys in the direction of home, to which attractive spot the more vigorous excursionists were finally glad to resort for rest and shelter during the heat of midday.

It was nearly nightfall when the household of Mustapha set forth once more in quest of pleasure, and if the morning's entertainment was brilliant and novel in the extreme, that of the evening was no less remarkable for romantic and picturesque interest. A clear silver crescent overhung the city, and was reflected in those representative emblems of itself which surmounted every minaret and tower. But its light was not sufficient to illuminate the labyrinth of streets, and the little procession was preceded and followed by servants carrying lamps of richly coloured glass. Other attendants were laden with baskets of cakes, fruit, and various delicacies, while still a third company officiated as pipe-bearers. The party were organized as in the morning, the female portion, in consideration of Maysunah's feebleness, being mounted on the well-trained donkeys. Their destination was the banks of the Barada, towards which at sunset the whole city invariably throngs; but in order to avoid the crowd, Mustapha had chosen as a banqueting-place a kiosk at some little distance from the walls, and had secured the exclusive enjoyment of its privileges.

Most cities have their pleasure-grounds, their parks, the Elysian fields, but the gardens of Damascus excel them
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Elsewhere art has done much, but here Nature is triumphant, and the perfection of rural scenery is the characteristic endowment of the "Diamond of the Desert." The spot which Mustapha had made choice of was but one among a thousand such. It was fitted up in the simplest style. A wooden platform extended beyond the river-bank, and partially overhung the stream. Its roof was of matting, its pillars the untrimmed stems of trees, its seats a species of simple camp stool; but far away to right and left stretched a vista of foliage, fruit, and flowers, groves of every shade of verdure canopying a smooth green sod, or an undergrowth of rarest shrubbery. Beneath ran the rapid river, transparent, cool, refreshing the ear with its music, and reflecting in its waters the coloured lights of the cafés that lined its banks and the gay costumes of the pleasure-seeking multitude. The knotty pillars of the kiosk were wreathed with profusely blossoming vines, and festoons of jessamine, honeysuckle, and myrtle draped the intervening spaces otherwise open to the moonlight and the stars.

Here, regaled with delicate confections, sipping cool sherbet, or puffing at the perfumed narghileh, the traveller feels that the Oriental may almost be forgiven for his faith in a sensual paradise.

But in the present case there was more than mere physical enjoyment to give interest and value to the scene. Representations of various nations and lands were met together in fraternal relations; and in the quiet converse beside the rippling stream, the French missionary, the cosmopolite American, the self-exiled Englishman, and the Syrian Turk, all bore their part, and bore it well, for all were men of refinement, culture, and experience. So they talked of life, of politics, of travel, of things new and old, of things that had been, and of things that were to be. Neither strove to exalt his religion, his country, or the government to which he owed *allegiance*; for all had learned liberality in the wide school of *the world*, and felt that it was not acting a becoming part to *shut their eyes* to the good which they could not deny, or *criticise the evils* which they could not mend. Thus they

talked together as brethren united at last in good-will towards each other, and humanity at large.

Maysunah, released from her muffling veil, reclined meanwhile in an obscure corner of the kiosk, on cushions which had been brought thither for her convenience. She betrayed no interest in the conversation of her father and his friends, which was for the most part beyond her limited comprehension; but she watched with childish pleasure the neighbouring groups of excursionists, and pointed out to Havilah the bright reflections on the stream, and seemed exhilarated with the rare enjoyment of the occasion. Havilah sat beside her, responded to her simple questions, and returned her mute caresses; but the head a little inclined, the listening attitude, the occasional demonstration of earnest feeling proved that Havilah's attention was divided between the innocent prattle of her child friend, and the grave eloquence of the Turkish or priestly sage. Once or twice she even left her place beside Maysunah, seated herself a moment near M. Lapierre or her father, and drank in the instructive discourse, then, as if self-reproached at having forsaken Maysunah, she stole quietly back to her side.

Meredith was reminded of the evenings on the house-top in Lebanon, where Havilah fondled the head of her gazelle, fit prototype of Maysunah, with one hand, and leaned her own head on the other, while she lent a listening ear to the conversation of the assembled circle; but then it was the grace of her form, the rare outline of her features, the sparkle of her eye which inspired the Englishman's tongue. Now Meredith spoke but little. The young girl's eye was no longer a key to the scholarly rhetoric of his brain. He was at once a humbled, a more silent, and a wiser man. He scarcely glanced at Havilah; but the consciousness of her presence was like a pure element mingling in the discourse, and when Father Lapierre paid a tribute to virtue, and Mustapha's grave features softened while he rehearsed some tale of self-denial or charity, Meredith felt a sympathetic joy in the thought, Havilah also hears this, and her soul is made glad.

So sped the evening, and when the young moon went down, the noiseless attendants resumed their burdens, and the patient donkeys theirs, and with scarcely more sound or sense of motion than that of the pale crescent at her retiring, the little party retraced their way to the house of Mustapha.

And as sped one day and night, so sped every day and night of our traveller's stay in Damascus. The mornings were devoted to tours through the city, the evenings to rustic pleasure and social intercourse. The former, however, were seldom participated in by the entire household. One excursion a day taxed Maysunah's strength sufficiently, Havilah would not forsake her friend, and with the exception of Meredith, the gentlemen of the party had personal and private claims upon each other's time. Our Englishman therefore indulged frequently in solitary rambles, or availed himself of whatever companionship might offer. M. Trefoil's nervous energy in sight-seeing was soon expended; but M. Lapierre, or Mustapha, or both, were frequently associated with Meredith in his visits to citadel, palace, and mosque. The Turkish Effendi was especially anxious to familiarize his English guest with the antiquities and attractions of Damascus, and attended him with unwearied assiduity. There was a marked congeniality between the young man and his host, and the circumstances of their intercourse served to impress Meredith with a continually increasing respect and admiration for the conscientious and upright Moslem.

They visited the slave-market together. As they walked through its various apartments, and beheld its chained victims, the free-born Briton could scarcely conceal his pity, abhorrence, and disgust. The faces of the fair Georgians, at once anxious and defiant, roused his chivalrous compassion. He burned to break the rivets that bound the swarthy limbs of iron-built men; his soul sickened as he beheld a diseased, emaciated, aged group, and reflected on the probability of *their perishing from neglect*, since no ruthless slave-holder *could burden himself with such mere incumbrances*. In vain *did he look to his companion for some expression of sympathy*

for these poor wretches, and as Mustapha strode from stall to stall with an apparently unruffled countenance, Meredith said to himself, "such is the hardening effect of habit."

The next day, as he was passing through the outer court of Mustapha's house, he saw a litter which four sturdy carriers were about to lift upon their shoulders. It contained three individuals. One was blind, the others crippled, and all were wasted with disease. Their rags had been exchanged for neat apparel, but Meredith at once recognized the miserable group who had yesterday been exposed for sale in the slave-market.

"Who are these?" asked he of the stately major-domo, who was superintending their removal.

"Unfortunates whom my master has purchased at the slave-market, O your excellency."

"But they are incurables," said Meredith, as they passed out of sight. "They will never be fit for labour."

"True, your excellency. But it is those who can serve no longer who are henceforth the charge of the Lord's servants; and 'the Lord is surely in a watch-tower, whence He observeth the actions of men.'"

"Is there then an asylum for these poor sufferers?"

"The house which my master formerly occupied in the next street is the hospital to which these children of sorrow are about to be carried," said the major-domo. "More than a score of the old and destitute are there cherished and maintained at the expense of Mustapha."

"How noble a charity!" exclaimed Meredith. "Heaven reward your master!"

The major-domo gravely pointed to a slab of porphyry inserted in the wall, and read from it these words of the Koran: "On the last day every soul shall find the good which it hath wrought present, and the evil which it hath wrought it shall wish that between itself and that were a wide distance."

"How true is it," thought Meredith, as he walked away, "that the poor in heart may distil virtue from an erring ex-

and that practices which are the sinner's temptation may become the good man's opportunity!"

It was not many days after this that Meredith chanced to be present at a conversation between M. Lapierre and Mustapha, which was in itself suggestive, and which possessed an ulterior interest to the young man, furnishing, as it did, a sequel to the dialogue to which he had been an involuntary listener on the first night of his arrival in Damascus.

M. Lapierre, the Effendi, and Meredith had been devoting some hours to an examination of the Mosque of the Omeiyades, which is the most interesting antiquity in Damascus, having passed successively under the control of Roman, Christian, and Saracenic dynasties, and representing in its architecture superb relics of each nation and age. The visitors had wandered through the transept, aisles, and nave of the present temple, had traced with curious eye the long colonnades and half-buried pillars which furnish a clue to the gigantic dimensions of earlier structures, and paused at length before a magnificent portal emblazoned with sculptured scroll-work, and surmounted by an ancient inscription.

"My ear is familiar with the Greek tongue," said Mustapha, pointing significantly to the tablet, "but I have no knowledge of its written characters. Perhaps, O venerable father," he continued, addressing M. Lapierre; "thou canst illuminate my mind as well as that of his excellency the English Effendi."

M. Lapierre was gazing with emotion at the tablet. So too was Meredith, for both had at once deciphered the Septuagint inscription, which, engraved there at some unknown period by some unknown hand, has survived the ravages of superstition and war, has defied the heathen and his gods, and still utters its solemn protest in the very stronghold of Mahomedanism.

"Thy kingdom, O Christ, is an everlasting kingdom, and *thy dominion* endureth throughout all generations,"* was

* Mr. J. L. Porter relates in his work, "Five Years in Damascus," the interesting circumstance of his having translated this inscription to a *rich effendi* who accompanied Mr. Porter on the occasion of his *visiting the Mosque of the Omeiyades*.

the solemn, emphatic utterance of M. Lapierre, as he faithfully construed to the ear of Mustapha the hitherto enigmatical passage.

The Turk slowly withdrew his eyes from the inscription, and fixed them upon the missionary in grave wonder.

"Thou dost not deceive me, O man of truth," he said, in an undoubting tone. "As I would keep my own soul spotless from a lie, so do I trust thine honour. But believe me, only blindness or ignorance could suffer that inscription upon the wall of a mosque of Islam, which the crescent has surmounted for twelve hundred years."

"It is a truth which is written everywhere, my brother," answered Father Lapierre, mildly; "but the eyes of many are shut to it, and many need an interpreter."

"Thou art unjust or mistaken, O aged father," replied Mustapha with confidence. "The cities of the West may build temples and inscribe tablets to the prophet of Israel, but the lands of the sun-rising pay sole allegiance to Mohammed, beloved of Allah."

"And yet, O Mustapha, in the courts which thou frequentest daily, ay, within thine own dwelling, is a tablet dedicated to Him of Nazareth, and written all over with the truth of his gospel," said Father Lapierre, impressively.

"How sayest thou?" exclaimed Mustapha, a slight flush of indignation mounting to his cheek, although his tone continued courteous and calm. "Have I not ever been a faithful Moslem? Do I not keep ever before me the sacred precepts of the Koran? Are they not written in letters of gold upon my walls and my door-posts? Who then shall dare affirm that there is a corner even within the thouse of Mustapha dedicated to any other than the Meccan prophet?"

"I bear solemn witness to the fact myself," said father Lapierre, in a rapt and elevated tone.

"And on what secret tablet is it inscribed?" anxiously questioned Mustapha.

"On the heart of thy child."

The flush suddenly faded from the cheek of the Turk; b

dignified form trembled visibly. With an eye penetrating rather than severe, he gazed into the face of M. Lapierre, who met the astonished scrutiny with a composure as serene as that of the apostle when Agrippa said unto him, "Paul, thou art beside thyself." It was a moment before Mustapha could command his voice; and his words, when at length they came, were spoken not in anger, but in the low, measured tones of one whose nature is stirred to its depths. "Thou art skilled, I know, in the diseases of the flesh, O worthy physician," he said, "but canst thou pierce to the innermost soul?"

"There are some diseases of the body," answered M. Lapierre, "which the soul alone can reveal. In such cases human means avail nothing, and the skill of the hakeem is wasted. Have drugs had power to heal Maysunah, or narcotics to soothe?"

"Alas!" said the unhappy father, with melancholy candour, "thou knowest they have all been tried in vain."

"I know it, and I will tell thee why. The spirit and the flesh are at war in thy child. Her wasting fever is an immortal thirst. Her disease has its root in the soul."

"And its remedy?" faltered Mustapha.

"Is here;" and M. Lapierre drew a little volume from a pouch in his black robe, and placed in Mustapha's hands a Turkish translation of the Scriptures.

There was a mingling of eagerness and superstitious dread in Mustapha's reception of the gift. He grasped it firmly, handled it awhile without opening its covers, as if fearful of their contents, then resolutely turned over its pages, and read a passage here and there.

M. Lapierre meanwhile watched the emotions of the Moslem, unconsciously influencing him by the power of his clear, magnetic eye. Meredith turned away. There was a struggle going forward in the fond, proud heart of Mustapha which it was painful to witness.

He was long in coming to a determination, but when he did, it was final. Mustapha was not given to half-way measures, and the generous kindness with which he at

length extended his hand to the missionary was in itself decisive.

"Because thou hast been frank with me, O holy man," said he, "therefore will I trust thee. Hadst thou made this book a barrier betwixt me and my child, thou hadst then acted a traitor's part; but thou hast confided in me, and I will teach thee that Mustapha is a man in whom thou mayst safely confide. And because truth has set its seal upon thy heart and thy lips, O friend of the most high God, the well spring from which thou hast drunk cannot be false. I ask thee not when nor how Maysunah has tasted of this fountain, nor who has awakened in her this thirst unquenchable; but that which is wholesome for the child cannot be poison to the parent. Together we will search these Scriptures," he added, aptly quoting from a passage on which his eye had fallen, "and see if they have in them eternal life."

So saying he hid the book in his bosom, and without another word led the way out of the temple.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The Bedouin Embassy.

It had been the intention of our travellers to devote a few days only to Damascus, but owing to the allurements of the city itself, and the urgent hospitality of Mustapha, this period was first prolonged to a week, and then one week ripened into two. But the time at length came when the party unitedly agreed to resist every temptation to further delay. M. Lapierre was anxious to be restored to his flock; Meredith had now had enough of the genuine Oriental in his disposition to be a systematic idler, and the strong moral purpose which had recently imparted to him newness of life, made him realize more than ever that action must henceforth be his only rest.

With the revival of cheerfulness, M. Trefoil had also experienced an awakening of the spirit of enterprise, and he began to comprehend the state of his affairs, and indulg

dreams of retrieving his fortunes. No surplus funds had been found in the hands of his faithful consignee, but the generous Mustapha not only encouraged his friend by advice, but volunteered substantial aid towards the restoration of the fallen silk-mill, an undertaking concerning which the manufacturer was now as eager as he had once been indifferent.

Havilah, petted, worshipped, caressed, began to pine within the painted walls of Mustapha's house. Her heart warmed tenderly to the fond, clinging Maysunah, but the seclusion of the harem, to which they were both condemned for the greater part of every day, proved oppressive to the spirits of the mountain girl; the society of her young friend failed to satisfy her; for the first time in her life she experienced the pangs of restlessness and discontent. She believed, poor child, that she was house-sick. She had faith that the air of Lebanon would work her cure; and thus she too longed to be gone.

A day for departure was therefore positively fixed upon, and schemes of recreation and professed idleness gave place to urgent preparation for travel.

It was matter of surprise to Meredith and the other gentlemen of the party, that Abdoul had absented himself from their presence, and had not once been seen since their arrival in Damascus. It was true that he had only engaged to conduct them thither, and might have inferred from his abrupt dismissal that his attendance was no longer desired. On the other hand, it was not impossible that he had, in pursuance of a national instinct, gone to seek his tribe in the desert, been detained beyond his calculations, and might yet return in season to conduct the equally dilatory travellers on their return route, which was to be by the way of Baalbec and the famed cedars of Lebanon.

Meredith, who was accustomed to the youth's services, *indulged the hope that this might prove the case, and forbore securing any other dragoman, in the faith that the boy would in some characteristic manner turn up at the last moment.*

Havilah, had she been consulted, might have somewhat

enlightened Meredith in respect to his servant's haunts and occupations, for she had her suspicions, amounting finally to a conviction, that Abdoul had lingered in Damascus or its vicinity during nearly their entire stay, that he had made himself master of their movements, dogged their footsteps, and played the spy upon their actions. In one instance she believed, in another she was confident, that when passing through the Arab quarter of the city, she had caught sight of the boy among a group of ragged Bedouins, himself shabbily clad, and wearing the constrained and cringing aspect which always marks his race when in the atmosphere of a city. There was nothing external to distinguish him from his companions, but the keen, scrutinizing gaze which he bent upon each individual of the party that included Havilah, betrayed him instantly to one who could not be mistaken as to the well-known expression of that piercing eye.

In one solitary instance, when she was privileged to ride with her father and Meredith through the fragrant gardens of the environs, her pleasure in the excursion was marred by the consciousness that they were followed and watched by a mounted Bedouin, who finally shot past them with the speed of an arrow, and was recognized by Havilah, in spite of the ample keffiyeh which purposely hid his face.

And once again. It was night, and Havilah, seated beside Meredith, was leaning over the rail of the garden kiosk, watching the tree-shadows reflected in the stream. The position of both was accidental, they having been deserted by the other members of the household, who early in the evening had formed a group in that corner of the pavilion, but had now retreated to its inner recesses, M. Trefoil to doze over his pipe, and Maysunah and her father to listen uninterruptedly to some simple explanations of Christian truth from the lips of M. Lapierre.

So Meredith and Havilah were left to each other's society, an opportunity which they could not be said to improve, since scarcely a word had been exchanged between them. Neither was an object of envy, for both were sad. A little while ago

and Meredith had been speaking of England, and the necessity of his speedy return thither, speaking not with the enthusiasm of the home-bound traveller, but the brave determination of a man going forth to his labour. Nor was this fortitude strained or stoical. Work was no longer a mere escape from self; it had its inspiration and its ardour, and unconsciously as Meredith alluded to the long-neglected cares of home, he spoke with the manly self-devotion of one who having turned his back on happiness, began to see something attractive in the rugged face of duty.

He began to see, but the light in his soul was newly lit. It illumined the first steps of his way, but no more. It gave him courage to set forward, but the distant future was still a dreary blank, and still his soul was sad.

His conversation had been addressed to the elder members of the company, and Havilah had been only a listener. It was the first intimation she had received of Meredith's plans, and now, as she sat watching the flickering shadows, she half forgot that the Englishman was by her side. She too had gone out into the future, and in imagination she was following him over sea and land. The scope of her own little life seemed suddenly narrowed, her own heart seemed not large enough for her to live in. She could not endure to think of El Fureidis. She feared she should be house-sick even in Lebanon. She yearned for something she knew not what; a home perhaps in the stars.

She was roused from her reverie by the dipping of oars within a few feet of the spot where she sat, and immediately there skimmed past a flat-bottomed boat, manned by thin, wiry, white-cloaked Bedouins. It came, and was gone in an instant, a weird, ghastly, ghost-like craft, but as it darted along the edge of the kiosk, a dark face at the bows peered for an instant between the net-work of vines that ran around the summer-house, and Havilah saw the glow of a malicious but gratified curiosity overspread the face of Abdoul, as he reviewed every feature of the scene within.

She glanced at Meredith, but his eyes were fixed on a little

cloud passing over the moon; he had not changed his position, he evidently had not observed the boy, and on this, as on previous similar occasions, Havilah maintained her composure, and, though indignant and alarmed, prudently kept her own counsel. The event, however, gave a new current to her thoughts, and for the remainder of the evening she could not wholly banish from her mind the undefined fears excited by the temper and behaviour of the youth, who seemed to her at once a friend and an alien. She shrank from confiding her suspicious doubts to any one, but secretly hoped that Abdoul would remain in Damascus, and another escort be secured for the homeward journey.

But with her knowledge of his vicinity, and the familiarity he had acquired with the movements of her party, she was the least astonished of the household when, on the very day preceding that appointed for departure, Abdoul presented himself within the courts of Mustapha, and solicited an interview with his master, M. Trefoil, and Father Lapierre.

That the Ishmaelite should appear thus opportunely might pass for one of the accidents or coincidences of a lawless and vagrant life, but coming as he did, it was difficult to recognize in him the outlaw or the vagabond, for it was not as a menial or a hireling that Abdoul now craved an audience, but as an ambassador and a prince.

Only in an eastern land could one accustomed to wait and to serve assume with any degree of plausibility the airs of an equal and a lordling; but the Oriental, of whatever grade, is a born nobleman in all that pertains to the exterior graces and courtesies of life; and Abdoul, inured to hardship, greedy of gain, and eager for hire, knew how, when occasion served, to bear himself as the son of a chieftain, and the heir of a boundless realm.

It is true he came attended only by the same rude specimens of his tribe who had lately been enlisted with him in *Meredith's service*, and a single veteran Arab, who was a *more recent delegate* from the tents of Zanadeen; but Abdoul had now assumed a dress corresponding to the rank he emu-

lated, the soiled and ragged habiliments of his companions had been either superseded or overlaid by some attempts at display and finery, and the superb beard and stately deportment of "mine uncle," which was the title Abdoul bestowed on his elder associate, served as a sufficient guarantee of the latter's state and respectability.

Formal and tedious were the introductions and salaams with which Abdoul thought proper to prepare his communication, and postpone the actual object of his visit; but the solemnity and importance of his embassy being thus attested, he at length opened his commission with characteristic grace and brevity. "Zanadeen, sheik of the mighty Anezys, prince of the tribe of the Kahtaride, sends greeting and salutation to thee, O father, of the snowy beard, and to thee, O skilful weaver of silk, and to thee, O most excellent Frank," said the young courtier, gravely making obeisance to each individual as he addressed him in his turn. "North-east of the pearl of cities, between Kierystein and Sadown, in the wilderness, the sheik has pitched his house of hair; around him on every side the dwellings of his people dot the plain. Spring smiles on the desert, the cattle find pasture, the Bedouin rejoices in the bounty of Allah. The great heart of Zanadeen yearns to welcome the stranger, and to call him brother and friend. The swift-winged messenger of Abdoul has borne tidings to the paternal ear that ye sojourn now to Damascus. By the mouth of yon gray-bearded man, mine uncle, the sheik sends answer back. O listen to his words. 'Say thus to the worthy people who journey from Damascus to Baalbec: Zanadeen, chief of the Anezys, prays you to depart from the straight line of travel, and honour the Arab tents with your presence. Mounted on the swift camel, the desert track can be crossed between sun and sun. The escort and the caravan shall be the care of Zanadeen; the best animals of the tribe already await you at Jerfid, one day's journey from Damascus, the soft-paced dromedary will be proud to bear hither so fair a burden as thy daughter, O most excellent Trefoil. The women of our harem will welcome her with joy, though

her beauty put theirs to shame. Our wives and our daughters, our sons and our warriors, will vie with each other to show hospitality to you all. The journey may be to you the loss of a few days; it will add joyful years to the life of Zanadeen. With anxiety the chief awaits your answer; may it be favourable to the hopes he cherishes.' Such are the words of Zanadeen."

As Abdoul finished speaking, he crossed his arms on his breast, and with the dignified air of a royal diplomatist, whose communication is ended, he stood awaiting the reply to his proposals.

The manner, no less than the subject of his mission, imparted to it a grave character, and seemed to demand a direct and decisive answer. There was a moment's silence among his audience; then an interchange of glances, then a low-voiced conference. Arguments were adduced in favour of, and adverse to the proposition, but the former preponderated. It was unanimously decided, that although the détour into the desert would prolong the homeward journey, the prospect of a glimpse at nomadic life, the certainty of a safe escort to Baalbec, and the pleasure of gratifying the sheik and his son, were satisfactory compensations for the delay. Both M. Lapierre and Meredith were desirous that the decision should be referred to Havilah; but M. Trefoil unhesitatingly took it upon himself to answer for her in the affirmative. M. Lapierre was therefore deputed to signify in the name of his party their acceptance of Zanadeen's proffered hospitality; an office which the courteous old man executed with a punctilious deference to ceremony, which served to enhance the dramatic effect of the interview.

In the name of his father, himself, and his tribe, Abdoul acknowledged the compliment involved in this favourable decision by a hyperbole of thanks. The details of departure on the morrow were conducted in a similar strain of mutual deference; and the youth and his companions finally took their leave, retreating backward to the door, and accompanying the act with profound and repeated reverences, thr

El Fureidis.

demeanour from first to last constituting a scene which would in any other land have been a complete travesty, but which here among these habituated to Eastern manners, gave no occasion even for a smile.

It was not until the next morning that any opportunity occurred of acquainting Havilah with the new programme of adventure which awaited her, and even then her father mentioned it with a carelessness which showed how little importance he attached to the change of route. He was not a little disconcerted, therefore, at the look of blank disappointment, and even dread, which overspread her face at the announcement, and at the sudden remonstrance which escaped her. "Not wish to visit the father of your old playmate?" he exclaimed, in dismay, for he had truly believed she would be attracted by the novelty of the excursion. "Shrink from the camel-riding? dread the loneliness of the desert? fear the exposure to the sun? That is not like my adventurous girl. I never had a doubt but you would be charmed with it all. But," continued the man, zealous in kindness, and fertile in resources, "you shall be suited as well as me, my daughter. We are pledged to go, but you shall stay in Damascus; we will take the trip without you into the desert, and return hither before continuing to Baalbec; that is the best plan after all. Meredith will consent; so will Father Lapierre. They were anxious you should be consulted, but I was an obstinate old fool."

M. Trefoil thought he had hit upon a satisfactory expedient; but if Havilah had instinctively shrunk from his previous scheme, she was vehement in resisting this. On no account would she be separated from him and their friends. Not a word of it to Mustapha, not a hint to Maysunah, she besought of him with earnest entreaty. They would insist upon her remaining; she was bent now on the desert journey. *Her father was puzzled, but coaxed into a state of satisfied bewilderment, and brought to declare, patting her on the cheek, that he could not comprehend such an inconsistent little woman, who neither wished to go, nor to be left behind,*

but that she should have her own way if she could find out what it was; and fearful now of being left in Damascus, Havilah no longer suffered her way to be a matter of question. Her way was the way of her party.

Maysunah was overwhelmed with childish grief at the parting, her only consolation being in the hope of returning Havilah's visit before many months. The sick girl's health was already improving, and with a view both to her happiness and her complete restoration, her father had promised that before the summer was past, he would bring her with him to the Lebanon.

"I shall look for you with longing eyes, my white dove," said Havilah, as they took a farewell embrace within the inner court. "Come quickly, and stay long; I shall yearn for your sweet company; I shall be alone — all alone;" and Havilah burst into tears.

Maysunah had been weeping for hours, but she dried her own tears to wipe away those of her friend, and felt herself grow and expand in the thought that she was destined to fill a void in Havilah's heart, little dreaming, simple child, that Havilah was already weeping less for her than at the presentiment of a loss which all Maysunah's love would be powerless to repair.

But no tears were on Havilah's face, no hesitation in her step or air when bidding adieu to the hospitable roof of Mustapha: she mounted her horse amid an assembled retinue. If she had fears, she silenced them. She looked around her with apparent confidence, sat erect in her saddle with the proud air of one who defied danger, waved her hand gracefully to her host, and smiled kindly upon Abdoul. The boy's handsome face glowed, and his heart swelled with warm rapture as he returned the salutation of his queen, and springing upon his white mare, realized that he was no longer the servant, but the leader of the well accoutred procession which was setting forth on the route of the *Palmyra caravans*.

CHAPTER XXIX.

The Desert.

THE first day's journey was performed on horseback. The road lay for three hours through the beautiful suburban gardens watered by the Barada and its canals, then stretched away between the base of Anti-Lebanon on the left, and a boundless plain on the right, melting into the distant horizon. As the path at times crossed the lower spurs of the mountain, the plain presented to the traveller's eye a scene of varied and indescribable beauty, varied as the unreal visions of childhood, indescribable as the pleasures of a happy dream, for the sun played deceitfully over the prospect, and fair islands, bright gardens, lakes with rippling surface, and streams with emerald shores; all wore the effect of the magic mirage. But it was not yet the genuine desert travel. There were ravines to be crossed, and villages to be encountered, and occasional glimpses yet to be seen of stationary, if not civilized life. A short time only was allotted for lunch at a little Arab village, and by means of diligent, and at times rapid riding, Jerûd, the halting-place for the night, was reached at sun-down.

The camels and escort promised by Sheik Zanadeen were already arrived. As Abdoul proudly led the way through the principal street of the village, he exchanged frequent salutations, not only with the inhabitants of the place, who knew him well, but with several gaily-dressed members of his tribe, who were loitering there evidently in anticipation of the guests. As their tribe was on friendly terms with the sheik of the district, they had been freely admitted within the gates, but their camels were picketed outside in the direction of the desert. The aga, or governor, who maintained his court at Jerûd, came forth from his house to welcome the *travellers*, and proffer his hospitality, but the confusion that prevailed in his court-yard, which constituted a sort of military outpost for the protection of the desert frontier, was

such that his invitation was declined; and in accordance with Abdoul's motion the party rode out of the village by the opposite gate to that by which they had entered, and chose a place of encampment near a little fountain, around which the camels were already grouped. The travellers were now on the borders of the desert, were already the guests of the Arabs, and were surrounded by evidences of nomadic life. Swarthy Bedouins were passing to and fro with the free step and confident air which these sons of the wilderness assume the moment they are on their undisputed territory. Camels were stretching their long necks, and intruding their withered faces within the tents; an Arab boy outside was pounding coffee beans in a wooden mortar, skilfully beating time, and thus making a rude sort of music with his pestle.

Abdoul seemed transformed into a new creature. It was hard to recognize in him the shy being who, with his hand on his breast, his arms folded, and his countenance dejected, shrank from the eye of man. Now he walked erect, with a swift, springing gait, or vaulting lightly into his saddle, bounded over the fields leading to the village, busily executing some voluntary errand, or spurring on some lazy comrade who had failed to execute an order.

The whole expression of the young Arab's face was changed. He had gained, or nearly so, the height of his ambition. Elevated now to a position of authority and honour, he served his guests with amiability and zeal. His better nature, crushed by jealousy and mortification, appeared to expand under the influence of new responsibilities and hopes. Even his jealousy seemed satisfied now that he believed himself an equal in the contest, and breathed what he felt to be an atmosphere of fair play. It was impossible to suspect so unsophisticated a youth of sinister designs, or to believe that so true an Arab would ever violate the sacred laws of hospitality. Havilah, ashamed of her late suspicions, saw in him *once more* the brother of her childhood, reposed in him *an involuntary trust*, and never in her life slept a more un-

disturbed sleep than on that first night on the border of an unknown desert, and surrounded by a Bedouin guard.

The silence and repose of the desert does not infuse itself into its people. The Arabs are proverbially a noisy, excitable race. Especially when they have a journey in view, or work of any sort on hand, they accompany their labours with such a storm of shrieks, vituperations, and harsh, guttural dialogues, as would, among any other population, betoken an excess of fury and anger. There seemed to be a remarkably good understanding between Abdoul and the escort of which he was the chief. Still the occupants of the tents were disturbed at daybreak by a volley of threats, exclamations, and epithets, which elsewhere could only have been equalled by a rebellious soldiery or a crew of mutineers. Fortunately, strangers as they were in the desert, our travellers knew enough of Arab life and manners to understand that these noisy demonstrations were a necessary feature of an early-morning start, and that the camel-drivers and attendants, who, wrapt in their cloaks, had slept all night on the hard ground, were merely exercising their lungs in a familiar style of oratory. Thus the Yakh! yakh! Hai! hai! with which they shouted to their camels, and the Yullah! yullah! Wallah! wallah! with which they profaned every remark to each other, created no more alarm than the crowing of energetic cocks in a farm-yard, while the oaths and personal abuse with which they discussed their differences (for the most friendly Arabs will quarrel on every question, and argue every point) simply signified to the initiated that the daily conflict of opinion had begun, and that when it was concluded the caravan would start.

Long before the agitation was allayed, the guests of the party were ready and impatient to mount, for the sweet, *keen air of the desert* is the traveller's inspiration, and though *the sun's rays* may beat fiercely on his head, they serve only to *kindle a proportionate ardour* and an *intenser sense of joy*.

"*Hateful old camel! cruel, scorching sun! lonely, tedious*

journey!" whispered M. Trefoil to his daughter, in a tone of waggish irony, and rubbing his hands in high glee.

Havilah was standing beside the dromedary intended for her use. With a smile of gratified surprise, she was surveying the travelling equipment, her eyes glancing from the embroidered saddle-cloth, with its deep worsted fringes, silken tassels, and ornaments of shells, to the wide-spreading *shug-duf*, or cushioned frame-work placed across the animal's back, and surmounted by a little silken canopy. Abdoul meanwhile held the submissive creature by the head, and was gurgling in its ear the *Ikh! Ikh!* by which persuasive term the desert camel is invariably taught to kneel. M. Trefoil had not misinterpreted the animated glow that had been called up in Havilah's face by the novelty and excitement of the moment. She responded to her father's whisper by looking over her shoulder, her face rippling with a smile, which betrayed a quick comprehension of the sarcasm; then placing her foot beside that of Abdoul on the neck of the now prostrate dromedary, she sprang into her snug pavilion, and her smile broke into a peal of girlish laughter as she at the same moment caught sight of Geita vainly attempting to mount her camel, and making wry mouths at the scowling Arab, who was gesticulating at her, and shrieking in the ear of her beast.

"Look there," exclaimed M. Trefoil, with increased hilarity, nudging Meredith's elbow, and pointing to Havilah, in simple unconsciousness how little the Englishman had eyes for anything else when she was present. "See that child now in her nest of shawls, a butterfly among rose-leaves! a lady in a lobster! why she is in her element; and she tried to persuade me that she dreaded this expedition; a girl's subterfuge, I knew it all the while!" and the self-satisfied parent trotted off, and commenced the difficult task of climbing up the side of his own desert ship.

"*She laughs!*" thought Meredith, generously rejoicing the natural outburst. "I have not heard her laugh be

since her mother died;" and he felt his own heart grow lighter as all nature seemed to him to echo the merry peal.

"She laughs!" said Abdoul to himself, with sweet exultation. "The desert has given back smiles to the Lebanon rose. She carries music with her to the tents of Zanadeen;" and bounding upon his mare, and proudly waving his plumed lance over his head, the self-deluded youth led the way as he believed to scenes of yet deeper enchantment.

All Eastern travellers agree respecting the effect of desert journeying. All bear testimony to that wonderful purity of the air, which quickens the senses, sharpens the appetite, elevates the spirits, and diffuses through the whole frame a sense of increased vitality. "Hence it is," says Lieutenant Burton, after eulogizing at length the moral and physical benefits of this species of travel, "that the most material as well as the most imaginative minds, the tamest citizen, the most peaceful student, the spoiled child of civilization, all feel their hearts dilate, and their pulses beat strong as they look down from their dromedaries upon the 'glorious desert.'"

Hence it is, we may add, that the eye is never weary of scanning those objects, whether distant or near, which may chance to stand out on the fore-ground of desolation, their remoteness or rarity being more than atoned for by the intensity of a sharpened vision; and even while nothing is discernible save the blue sky above and the sandy and flint-strewn expanse beneath, the soul glows amid the grandeur and loveliness with the excitement of treading "a haggard land, infested with wild beasts and wilder men; a region whose very fountains murmur the warning words, 'Drink and away.'" Thus (to quote further from our author), man, "measuring his puny form with Nature's might," understands the Arab's proverb, "Voyaging is a victory."

To our excursionists, penetrating but one day's journey *into the Syrian desert*, and that too under the guardianship of *a powerful escort*, there was all the stimulus which can be *derived from the wild*, the picturesque, the sublime, *unmixed with any reasonable cause of apprehension or danger*. Still

it added not a little to the romantic character of the expedition, that Abdoul thought proper at intervals to dart away from his place at the head of the caravan, mount some little elevation, and gaze abroad with the keen eye of a reconnoitring party or scout. The print of a camel's hoof in the sand, or a cropped blade of grass in those spots where a scanty herbage had thrust itself through the hard gravel, was sufficient to excite the youth's suspicions, and put him on the alert. There was perhaps some little affectation in his proceedings, some assumption of weighty authority, some desire to display his graceful person and excellent horsemanship, but it almost invariably proved the case that his quick intelligence had acted as a telegraph, or his sharp eye as a telescope. Now his suspicions were confirmed by the abrupt appearance of a little company of Bedouins, emerging from a neighbouring hollow, and surprising all the party save Abdoul, who seemed quite prepared for their approach, gave them a friendly greeting, and suffered them to pass unchallenged. Now he suddenly spurred his mare across the plain, one hand grasping his dagger, the other causing his long lance to quiver above his head, in preparation for a stroke. He seemed to be rushing with Quixotic zeal against an imaginary foe, but the eyes that followed him with interest, were not long in discerning a couple of horsemen, who were bearing down upon the youth from an opposite direction, their pointed matchlocks and vehement gesticulations alarming the caravan for the safety of their champion, who might be exposed to some merciless enemy or hereditary blood-feud.

As the parties met, however, and the new comers uncovered their faces, purposely hid until now by their kefiyehs, weapons were lowered, angry gestures gave place to salutations, threats to embraces, mutual inquiries were exchanged between the young chieftain and these emissaries of a friendly tribe, then the former wheeled round and gravely returned to his post, the latter, without approaching the strange caravan, pursued their course in one of those diagon-

trackless lines with which, ever since the days of Ishmael, his roving descendants have been wont to intersect the desert.

These and similar incidents alone marked the day. As no oasis of verdure, not a tree nor even a shrub offered its tempting shade, no halt was made at noon: lunch was taken in haste, without dismounting, and the journey progressed uninterruptedly.

Towards sun-down our party began to perceive symptoms of an inhabited district. Horsemen, singly or in groups, frequently hove in sight, in some instances they approached sufficiently near to exchange a signal with Abdoul, in others they were satisfied with careering around the caravan in a wide circle, taking a distant observation, and then galloping off in the direction the travellers were pursuing. At length a low, dark line was discernible against the horizon; a few moments more, and the black tents of Zanadeen's tribe were clearly visible, mere specks in the floating cloud of animal life which encompassed them, and which constituted the wealth of this pastoral people. Soon the outposts of the encampment were gained, and the procession of escort and guests were winding amid groups of camels picketed at a distance from the tents, at whatever points the sparse herbage might serve the patient animals for pasture. Here and there slender, gracefully formed Arab girls were returning from their milking excursions with pails of foaming milk upon their heads, and shepherds were calling in their docile flocks, which followed obedient to the voices of their masters. These indications of nomadic life became more frequent at every step of our travellers' progress, until at length, as they approached the central point towards which men and flocks alike converged, they found themselves amid "one vast forest of camels, with a dense underwood of sheep and goats."

Numerous as were the dwellings of this great Anezy tribe, *their numbers were disproportionately small to those of the flocks and herds, and the latter would to a great degree have obscured the former, had it not been for the favourable site which had in this instance been selected for the "houses of*

hair." They stood on a gradual eminence, which commanded the entire plain, and were arranged in the form of a crescent, their fronts religiously turned towards Mecca. The house of Zanadeen possessed no advantage over those of the inferiors of the tribe, except that it was somewhat larger, was profusely adorned with tassels, shells, and fringe, and possessed a sort of supplementary tent, or harem. In accordance with Arab notions of hospitality, it was placed at the extremity, or horn of the crescent, nearest to the quarter whence the approach of guests might be anticipated, and thus almost before they realized its vicinity, the party of visitors halted at the very door, and in the very presence of their host.

Zanadeen, who had been duly informed of their approach, received them with patriarchal dignity. The old man was seated on a strip of Persian carpet spread before the entrance of his tent. His appearance was venerable in the extreme. His spare form was bent with years, his snowy beard, reaching below his breast, rivalled that of M. Lapierre. But his brilliant silk robe, his scarlet cloak, the heavily fringed kefiyeh bound around his white turban, imparted to the veteran Bedouin a wild and picturesque air; his deep-set eye was as keen and restless as that of his son, and surrounded as the sheik was by his nearest relatives and most distinguished men, it was easy to recognize in him the chief dignitary of the tribe.

Whatever might be Zanadeen's pride and ambition as a host, all emotions were superseded for a moment by the joy with which he welcomed back that frequent truant, Abdoul. The meeting between the father and son was truly affecting. Almost before the other members of the party had come to a halt, the youth had sprung from his saddle, thrown his arms round the sheik's neck, and kissed him on either cheek, a caress which was reciprocated with equal ardour; and then holding the boy by both hands, and with difficulty refraining from tears, the old man uttered brief and anxious inquiries concerning his son's health and welfare. Other members of the tribe, young and old, stood ready to strike palms with

young chief, and receive him to their embraces, and while these affectionate demonstrations were going forward, Zana-deen turned to bestow a greeting on his guests. Masahallah! (you are welcome,) Allah kerym (the Lord is gracious), and many similar exclamations of good-will and thanksgiving met the ears of the travellers, as one after another they alighted on the carpet at the tent-door; and the words of courtesy and kindness were caught up and echoed by the white-skirted, swarthy-faced, curious-eyed crowd until the air rang with the acclaim.

Most reverential and flattering was the sheik's reception of Havilah. As her feet touched the ground, the old man laid his hand on his heart and bent before her until the tip of his beard nearly swept the carpet. *Selámet ya meleký, saláme ya syt* (welcome, queen; welcome, madam), were the first words of his salutation, succeeded by compliments uttered in such a high-flown strain as to call the rich blushes into the young girl's cheek.

"My heart melts at the sight of thy beauty, O fair one! Thou art one of the visions of Paradise. Thou hast come to my soul in dreams. The planets of heaven borrow their light from thine eyes;" such was the hyperbole of praise which he poured forth until Havilah, modestly recoiling both from the old man's profuse flatteries and the gaping admiration of the Bedouin crowd, was glad to take refuge in the harem of the sheik, to which he at length conducted her.

The Bedouin harem is at once the store-house, kitchen, bedroom, and nursery of the household. That of Zanadeen's consisted of strips of black goats-hair cloth, stretched from a central pole to several similar supports arranged so as to form a square. Around the central staff large jars of honey or dates, wheat-sacks, and coffee-bags, and other family stores were stacked in a pyramidal form. Close to this promiscuous heap was placed a strip of carpet, which constituted the seat of honour. The remaining space which the tent afforded was voted to culinary and other domestic uses. In one corner *rinkled hag*, dressed in a long, blue robe, and with a black

handkerchief bound around her head, was leaning over a smoking caldron; near her were two young women, one of whom was pounding wheat in a copper mortar, and the other baking thin cakes upon a heated iron pan. All three looked up eagerly at Havilah as she entered; but none of them ceased their operations, or came forward to bid her welcome. This latter office was reserved for the presiding genius of the place, a tall, well-formed woman, who stood near the heap of stores, from which she had been dealing out portions to her subalterns. This was the favourite wife of the sheik, and the mother of Abdoul. The withered hag in the corner had formerly boasted the rank and favour now enjoyed by another. Her two sons also had once been the hope of Zanadeen, but one had been killed in a foray, one died in a desert march, and their mother had lived to be dethroned by a younger bride, and to see her rival's son the star and boast of his tribe.

The beauty of the present pride of the harem was already on the wane. But she had fullness and dignity of person; her eyes were large and lustrous; her lips, punctured, and stained with a blue dye, were compressed and haughty; her whole mien was indicative of conscious power, and her bright red kefiyeh, her armlets and anklets of coloured glass, and a heavy silver ring worn in her nose, suggested a love of savage finery.

Her reception of Havilah was a strange mingling of boldness, curiosity, and awe. She unhesitatingly took her young visitor by the hand, drew her within the tent, and invited her to take a seat on the carpet; then squatting down beside her, scrutinized her dress, her features, and her behaviour in silence. But impressed as the sheik's wife was by a loveliness and refinement which surpassed all her preconceived ideas, inquisitiveness soon got the better of her veneration, and she commenced handling the material of Havilah's dress, scarf, and shoes, at the same time assailing her with a volley of questions. Havilah submitted to her hostess' inspection with good-humour, and patiently answered all her queries; but it was something of a relief that the head of the establishment

was frequently interrupted, and summoned from her inquisitorial post to superintend the cooking department, and maintain her domestic sway. These episodes were not calculated to convey a very flattering idea of her temper or character. Her voice was loud, her manners and language overbearing and peremptory. Whether portioning out stores, directing her hand-maidens, or making occasional assaults upon her young children, — two little brothers of Abdoul, who were playing about the tent, — she evinced a pride and severity which made her presence less welcome each time that she returned to her place beside Havilah.

Preparations for supper meanwhile went rapidly forward. The aroma of coffee began to mingle with the almost suffocating smoke which filled the tent. The steam from the caldron was savoury with the herbs which were boiling among the stew. The thin cakes were baked crisp and brown. At length the huge joints of mutton were ladled out, and, floating in a sea of rice, were carried out to be served to the sheik and his guests; Havilah having declined everything save coffee, bread, and dates, which were brought her by the old woman.

Comparative quiet and order now ensued in the harem; the smoke gradually subsided, the cooking utensils were put out of sight. The sun had gone down, and as the moon rose late there was no light in the camp save that which proceeded from watch-fires burning in front of the semicircle of tents. The harem stood in the rear of the sheik's larger dwelling, and was therefore in deep shadow. Leaning against the camel-furniture which had been thrown over the bales and bags in the centre of the apartment, Havilah listened to the deep, nasal din of Arab talk and argument going forward in the camp, a din which she rightly foresaw would continue far into the night. Immediately around her, however, a refreshing stillness prevailed, the domineering principal had drawn off her children, and retreated herself to a partitioned corner of the sheik's tent; the young serving-women also had disappeared. Geita, vexed at the importunities of the Arab girls, had long since manifested her disgust at the whole

establishment by curling herself up in a corner like a kitten, and quietly dropping off to sleep.

"You are tired, pretty one," said a harshly-tuned but not unkindly voice, breaking in upon Havilah's meditations. She turned and saw the withered crone crouching close beside her, and looking up in her face. Havilah had no fear of the old Arab woman: she was accustomed to the ugliness of the ancient females of the race; and despite the discontented scowl which was the beldame's habitual expression, there was something in her patient assiduity and submission to a menial lot which had enlisted Havilah's sympathy. So she acknowledged her fatigue as a child makes confession to its nurse, and learned to her satisfaction that she and Geita were to enjoy undisturbed possession of the harem, the old woman alone officiating as their companion and protector. The weary traveller now wrapped herself in a thick bornous, lay down on a bed of Russian mats, and was hushed to sleep as by a lullaby, for the last sound she heard was the voice of the old woman, who, seating herself on the carpet, swayed her bent form backward and forward, and in monotonous tones invoked the peace of Allah upon her beautiful charge, whom she typified by many a sweet, endearing epithet, such as, *Ya ainee* (my eye), *ya kolbec* (my heart).

CHAPTER XXX.

The Camp of Zanadeen.

THE next day was a continued festival in the camp of Zanadeen. There was no lack of laborious activity among the Arabs of both sexes; but except the necessary tasks of milking the cattle and driving them to pasture, all the energies of the tribe were expended for the entertainment of their guests, and the universal enjoyment of the occasion.

The old women in the tents were busily occupied in making butter, and pounding wheat and spices. The shepherds were selecting the fattest of their sheep and kids, as

slaying them for the approaching banquet. The young women were braiding their long hair in innumerable tresses, and assuming their choicest anklets and rings. The young men were making preparations for the jeryd, or tournament with the lance, which was to constitute the chief diversion of the day.

This latter exercise involved numerous preliminaries. Horses of endless pedigree must be faultlessly groomed, fed with dainties, and caparisoned in a style proportioned to their rank and merits. Silver-embossed bridles must be polished, slender lances freshly plumed, and the youths themselves attired in the best outfit their scanty wardrobes could furnish. Finally, the space in front of the sheik's tent must be freed from all encumbrances, and the cattle picketed there removed to the opposite side of the camp, in order to afford the riders free scope to run their tilt.

Abdoul was the head and front of all these proceedings. Dressed in a gaudy silk robe, surmounted by a richly-embroidered vest, with his feet cased in yellow boots, and the fringed ends of his kefiyeh floating like pennons in the breeze, the handsome young chieftain curvetted over the plain upon his white mare, performing various equestrian manoeuvres, and devoutly believing himself the centre of all eyes. He had reached his pinnacle of grandeur, and never had city coxcomb more faith in his own pretensions than had this vain and ambitious boy in the infallibility of his daring hopes. He had flung down the gage to his rival, and already felt a foretaste of coming triumph. He little dreamed, poor heir of ignorance, and child of conceit, that while he was figuring as a picturesque spectacle, that rival was engrossing the heart of his queen, and winning victories over all his tribe.

Nor was he the only unconscious and ignorant party, for the Englishman was as innocent of endeavour, and incredulous of success, as the Arab was bold and presuming. *But this grave, self-abnegating Englishman had of late possessed some strange power of winning hearts. He knew the Bedouin race well; they had been his companions more*

or less for nearly a year. He spoke their language with fluency. In the deserts of Mesopotami and El Hejaz he had overawed them by his courage, and repressed their familiarity by his reserve. But it was otherwise now. He felt an awakening of manly tenderness and compassion for these errant children of the earth, paupers in all that is wealth and joy to the civilized man. He had come among them too as a guest, not to bargain for their services and resist their encroachments, but to enjoy their hospitality, and eat their scanty bread. It was a case to arouse his chivalrous interest and his desire to befriend.

His noble figure and frank countenance had prepossessed the tribe in his favour from the moment he entered their camp; the patience with which he had during the evening listened to their tales of exploit and foray had flattered their self-love, and the stories of modern invention and world-renowned discoveries with which he had entertained them in his turn, had taken possession of their excitable minds, exalted him into a hero, and held the fascinated attention of the group about the watch-fires far into the night.

And now, whether seated outside the sheik's tent, or strolling through the camp, he was followed and surrounded by an astonished, admiring throng, which, so far from repelling, he condescended to talk with and entertain.

Nor was he wanting in resources more real and tangible than those of an eloquent tongue. A miniature opera-glass which he produced for their inspection transported them with delight. A pocket-compass, whose use he carefully explained, prompted them to look upon him as a species of demi-god. One of those ingenious articles which, under the form of a jack-knife, contains a dozen of the minor conveniences of life, caused the curious crowd to huddle together, and gaze over each other's shoulders with flashing, covetous eyes. As these things were passed from hand to hand, many a Mashallah! testified their surprise; many an Inshallah! called heaven to witness; and when, with a profuse generosity for which the Arabs were unprepared, Meredith bestowed these valuables

on the chiefs of the tribe, and distributed gifts of fire-arms, tobacco, and clothing among the men of lesser note, their impulsive and easily-stirred natures were warmed to fever heat. With a storm of grateful thanks they hailed him as "father of good fortune," and so overwhelmed him with flattering expressions of affection, that he found himself much in the position of a visitor who has excited the children of a respectable family to a riot of which he begins to be ashamed, but knows not how to quell.

It was a relief, therefore, to his weariness and embarrassment when the sound of tambourines, cymbals, and other rude instruments denoted that the tournament was about to commence, and that he might be permitted to take a position with the other guests, and be an undisturbed spectator of the game.

Only the fresh youth of the tribe had a part in this military exercise. Mounted on perfectly trained horses, of which the riders seemed a part, they arranged themselves in two parallel lines, each youth facing his opponent, and awaiting a signal to commence the charge. Abdoul, conspicuous among his companions both for beauty and grace, was stationed at the extremity of that line which was nearest to the sheik's tent, and the simple waving of his hand served throughout the game as a word of command. Only a single antagonist advanced at the first summons, and was met by Abdoul in mid career, both horsemen holding their lances high above their heads, and causing the thin ends to quiver until they seemed like things of life. As the ambition of each youth was to disarm his adversary, their lances were the objects of attack. At the first charge the thrusts on both sides were unsuccessful. With a rapid evolution the attempt was resumed, but was in like manner foiled; one rider bending to his saddle bow, and *holding his lance close to the ground; the other, vaulting upon one side, and sheltering himself and his weapon behind the body of his horse.* Both tiltsmen were skilled in the game; *but though possessing a formidable adversary, Abdoul seemed to triumph in sure success, and challenged his comrade with*

superb effrontery. The opponent's lance was the prize of the contest. Nevertheless, Abdoul ventured to toss his weapon high into the air directly above his combatant's head, then dart forward, recover it, and dash on at a flying pace. Again, relying on the unequalled speed of the Khádhere, he hesitated not to fling his plumed reed in advance of him with such skill as to plant it upright in the ground. The game now became a race, but one in which the sheik's son was sure to win. The adversary made but feeble endeavours to imitate the young chief's daring, satisfied with acting on the defensive, and striving only to take advantage of the risks which Abdoul ran. But to do this was impossible. Abdoul's skill was only equalled by his wariness, and at length, in the very moment when he had carried his own temerity to the utmost, he bounded upon his enemy's lance, and bore it off in triumph.

This act was the signal for fresh lancers to rush into the mimic warfare, both the conqueror and the conquered demanding fresh adversaries; and as one after another was disarmed, and new opponents were called for, the whole company were gradually admitted into the lists. Thus the scene became more and more complicated, wild, and exciting.

The old chief and his guests meanwhile watched the progress of the game, their eyes instinctively following Abdoul, who, acting under the inspiration of Havilah's presence, appeared to be endued with magic powers. He was everywhere in the thickest of the mêlée, the tall plumes of his lance towering above those of his comrades. So wonderful and rapid were the feats he performed, that sometimes he knelt, sometimes stood aloft in the saddle, sometimes seemed for a second to be suspended from the Khádhere by his wiry hand, or the hollow sole of his foot, which clung as it were by magnetic attraction. Occasionally he leaped to the ground, ran a few steps, and vaulted again upon the back of the animal who apparently understood and aided her master's manoeuvres. One after another his antagonists were discomfited and disarmed but in no case was Abdoul baffled or his lance wrested fr

him. It was evident to the most careless observer that the chief's son was the unrivalled victor in the contest.

But however interested the spectators might be in the game and its actors, the scene was after all monotonous, and being prolonged for an unreasonable length of time, the attention of the group around the tent was gradually diverted. Questioned by the old sheik, who had all an Arab's curiosity, Meredith was led to speak of the military exercises of his own people. From this he had passed to tales of actual warfare, and the battles and sieges of the Crimea (recent horrors then) had been recounted for the chieftain's benefit. With open-mouthed wonder the veteran Arab had drunk in these wonderful narrations, the soul-stirring charge of the Light Brigade, so different from the feigned attacks and artificial forays of Arab life, had impressed him with thoughtful reverence. The recollection of these events had had power too over the mind of the narrator. Tender memories, ruptured friendships, private griefs were associated in Meredith's mind with the catastrophes he was describing, and turning to Havilah, who had stood beside him, not the least attentive of his audience, he by a sudden impulse appealed to her woman's sympathies in behalf of the desolate homes and broken hearts of England.

She was leaning on his arm: he held a wide umbrella above her head, to shield her from the sun. Either the possession of this convenient article, or some other tacitly assumed claim, had constituted him her protector amid this wild scene. Perhaps this familiar relation, perhaps a growing faith in her friendship, encouraged him to something of the freedom of former days, for he talked to her of noble school-fellows slain, and wives and mothers bereaved, as if he realized that they two had known sorrow, and pity had upon them a peculiar claim.

It was at this moment when Meredith spoke softly of the dead, unconsciously revealing his own desolation, and Havilah looked up at him with dewy eye, pitying the strangers much, but her friend more, when unobserved by them both the

tournament had ended, and the circle around the tent dispersed, that Abdoul galloped up on his white mare like some knight of old coming to find his guerdon of praise in those smiles which had so often cheered and encouraged the lesser exploits of his boyhood. He did not approach the tent from the front, but came up on one side; the mare stepping so daintily that her footfall was unnoticed; the umbrella too interposed between its owner and the boy until the latter had dismounted and come forward, lance in hand, ready to plant the victorious weapon at Havilah's feet. Such was evidently the youth's intention, but it was not fulfilled. A glance at her and her companion, alone, and mutually engrossed, was enough to change the countenance and purpose of the excited victor: his smile of triumph gave place to a fierce scowl; he grasped his lance with a savage gesture; he stood still with compressed lips, and eyes that would have committed murder if they could. Havilah started and coloured like a detected criminal: she saw at once that the demon had again taken possession of the boy, and with haste she strove to exorcise it; it was too late, however. Her "bravely done, Abdoul!" was hardly spoken, her hand scarcely outstretched in token of congratulation, before the youth had darted away round the corner of the tent, with difficulty repressing a menacing gesture, and followed by the white mare, which uttered a loud snort, and kicked up her heels disdainfully, as if resenting some insult offered to her master.

"Strange, whimsical fellow!" exclaimed Meredith, with mingled amusement and compassion. "In my country, he would be a subject for the mad-house; but here in the desert they are all wild men. He has disturbed you, though," continued the young man, anxiously. "I thought Abdoul had been too much of a courtier for that — too considerate a host! But do not regard his sudden freaks, I have found him amiable savage in the main. The heat is becoming too severe for you on this side the tent, will you go in?"

Havilah, flushed and agitated, replied readily in the affirmative, it being her chief desire now to escape from the

sence of Meredith, lest her continuing in his society should still further whet the jealous wrath of Abdoul.

The tournament was succeeded by a banquet, the principal — indeed, the only formal meal of the day. The fare consisted of boiled mutton served with rice, huge platters of dates, with pyramids of snowy butter in the centre, flat wheaten cakes, transparent honey, and in addition to these ordinary articles of diet, a roasted kid, stuffed with a paste made of pistachionuts, raisins, almonds, bread-crumbs, pepper and salt, a luxury, the preparation of which had taxed all the skill of the best cook of the tribe. This entertainment was partaken of by the men alone, females being by custom excluded. But this circumstance did not prevent Abdoul from finding in the occasion further food for his wrath and suspicion — a sort of food for which his appetite was more keen than for all the dainties of the banquet.

The compliments and ceremonials of a Bedouin feast are far from congenial to European tastes. The custom of plunging the hand into a common dish, and tearing the meat apart with the fingers is sufficiently objectionable, but a guest's forbearance is still further tested by the necessity of receiving with a good grace the choice morsels which are pressed upon him by hands that are none of the cleanliest. Meredith would gladly have dispensed with the surfeit of tit-bits with which he was especially distinguished, but while he secretly loathed the riceballs and fleshy morsels stretched out to him by greasy fingers from every quarter, Abdoul, seated in the outskirts of the convivial circle, saw in these and similar civilities tokens of the defection of his whole tribe to the enemy. Every flashing eye fixed in admiring reverence upon the Englishman, was like a spark striking upon the tinder of the boy's vindictive passions. There was a mine of inflammable matter underneath, waiting only to be ignited; but the explosion did not come yet.

Twilight stole upon the banquet, and gray evening soon enfolded the camp. Watch-fires were now lighted, and the circle of white-robed Bedouins seated in front of Zanadeen's

tent looked ghastly in the glare. Then brilliant black eyes reflected the firelight, and gleamed like a ring of miniature lamps. The goats-hair hangings in front of the tent were looped up so that the wives and female guests of the sheik had a full view of the scene of which they now became a part. Camel furniture and saddles heaped against the posts of the tent afforded comfortable seats to Havilah and Geita, as well as to M. Lapierre and M. Trefoil, who, in order that they might enjoy this luxury, had retreated within shelter of the awning. Meredith threw himself upon the carpet just outside the entrance, and nearly opposite to Havilah, who was at the outermost extremity of one angle of the primitive dwelling. Both were in such a position that their faces reflected the firelight. Abdoul, in a place of honour just beside his father, was seated with his back to the flame, and his countenance was in deep shadow.

The sheik had still one entertainment in reserve for his visitors, and he now made haste to announce it.

"O men of Lebanon, and thou, O most excellent Frank," said he, at the same time endeavouring by an authoritative gesture to silence the hum of guttural voices about him, that he might make his little oration intelligible — "ye have heard our tales of exploit and foray, ye have seen our most nobly descended mares, ye have witnessed the skill and horsemanship of our young men; know then that our tribe has still one more excellence to boast. The sons of Kahtan have ever been skilled in song: we have among us a Bedouin of pure blood, whose mouth drops pearls. Come forth then, O poet, rival of Antar, and recite a song in honour of our noble and well-beloved guests."

Thus summoned, a young Arab of handsome features and imaginative expression of countenance emerged from the swarthy ring, drew a rubabah, or one-stringed guitar, from beneath his gracefully falling abayah, and seating himself in the midst of his listeners, commenced the prelude to his *ballad*.

The instrument afforded but little variety, and the w

cian's execution was rude; still the positively monotonous, wiry sounds which he extracted from the single string were not without melodious effect, and were a fitting preparative for the rude chant which ensued.

The bard being a species of improvisatore, and his verse impromptu, his audience were wholly unprepared for the following rhapsody, which was accompanied by various expressive gestures, addressed to him who was the subject of the song.

"I have seen the Son of the West — the man of the strong limb and the generous heart;

He has come from the distant isles of the sea, and the children of the Orient welcome him as the "Father of good fortune."

Wherefore comest thou hither, O son of the fair-haired?

Why lingerest thou on the mountains and in the desert?

A soft breath from afar has lured thee hither;

Two dove-like eyes are the double spell that binds thee.

Thy heart is as tender as it is valiant. Thou art strong for love as for war.

Like a Lion wounded by a lance is the strong heart which love hath pierced.

Torment thyself not, O strong heart; there is a cure for thy wound.

Allah send thee healing.

Send peace, O Allah! to the son of the stranger.

Thy faithful children invoke thee to his aid."

The musician prolonged the last note of his song until the circle around him, who understood the hint, caught up the words of his invocation to Allah, and repeated them in enthusiastic chorus, waving their hands above their heads, and making the desert ring with their deep nasal voices.

Meredith, who at the very commencement of the chant had been manifestly annoyed by its personal character, put a more severe constraint upon himself as it proceeded, avoided meeting any one's eye, and took refuge in feigning an imperfect comprehension of the meaning and intention of the song. But even this secret embarrassment was soon lost in *sympathy* for the still greater confusion and distress of her to whom the succeeding stanzas were addressed; for as soon as *silence ensued*, the poet turned towards Havilah, and sang thus: —

"Take pity, O fair one, on him who thirsteth for thy love;

Take pity also on thyself.

Thy beautiful eyes are cast down, O Lebanon maid! lest their stolen glances should betray thee: but the poet who sings of love can read the signs of its torment.

He sees how at the voice of the Frank thy breast flutters like the breast of the dove who hears afar off the voice of her mate. Silence not the yearning within thee.

Then shall your mutual tortures cease;

Then shall ye both be blest;

Then will the children of the desert rejoice

In the joy of the fair youth and the dark-haired maid."

Once more the self-satisfied poet dwelt on the last syllable. Once more the susceptible crowd gathered voice for a rapturous chorus; but they were interrupted. A fierce cry, like that of some wild beast, a frantic bound, and the rubabah was snatched from the hand of the startled bard; its solitary string was snapped in twain, the instrument itself dashed in pieces on the ground, and Abdoul, wrapping his cloak over his face, strode beyond the boundaries of the circle, and disappeared in the darkness.

A fearful hubbub succeeded. The excitable Bedouins instantly sprang to their feet, grasped their weapons, and glared in the direction the youth had taken. Sheik Zanadeen, incensed and mortified at so manifest a breach of decorum on the part of his son, made haste to apologize to his guests; his clouded and anxious brow at the same time indicating no slight degree of parental anxiety. The circle of Arabs drew off in groups, and stood at a distance, gesticulating and chattering, their fierce faces and attitudes looking fiercer in the firelight, and indicating their contempt and indignation at the discourteous and inhospitable behaviour of the young chief.

Meredith received the sheik's apology in dignified silence. He knew the impetuous character of the people with whom he had to deal, and felt that it became him to manifest a certain degree of displeasure at Abdoul's conduct if he would keep alive that respect which is the traveller's safeguard.

Havilah also participated in this view of the case. Her head, bowed in maidenly shame during the progress of the song, had been suddenly buried in her hands as she witnessed the wrath of Abdoul, and her whole frame had trembled with agitation. With proud composure, however, she now rose, placed her arm in that of M. Lapierre, made a respectful salutation to Zanadeen, and under the old pastor's protection withdrew to her tent.

It naturally fell to M. Trefoil to conciliate all parties. This was the kind-hearted man's natural province, and he but acted out his impulses in playing the part of a pacificator, professing himself confident of the sheik's friendship, assuring the latter of Meredith's disposition to overlook any personal slight.

As Meredith's severity was but a pretence of anger, as he was in reality far more vexed with the indiscreet poet who had put Havilah to the blush, than with the miscreant youth who had interrupted the song, the humbled sheik had no difficulty in appeasing his English guest, and mutual expressions of good-will were at once exchanged.

But it was neither politic nor possible to revive the social character of the occasion; the mortified Bedouin made no attempt to reunite in conversational circles, and at a comparatively early hour the camp was silent, and its dwellers scattered to their respective tents.

CHAPTER XXXI.

The Crisis.

THE watch-fires burned lower and lower, then smouldered and went out. The moon was far on the wane, and had not yet risen. Stars lit up the sky, but not the desert. Havilah, a pale watcher in the harem tent, shuddered at the gathering darkness which seemed to her like a curtain let down before the final act of a tragedy. Little Geita was sound asleep. The snoring of the old woman attested that she

too was oblivious of yesterday, and unconscious of to-morrow. Only Havilah remembered the one, and longed for the other.

She had looped up one corner of the tent-hanging, and sat where she could command a rear view of the whole semi-circular encampment. There was one among the black tents on which she had kept her eye fixed so long as there was the faintest glimmering of light; and now her ear was strained in that same direction. Thus she sat for hours; the time seemed long, but she felt no uneasiness, and no wish to sleep. At length a faint light illumined the east, and a narrow strip of moon put forth its slender horn. It was not the day-dawn, only a cold, early-morning moon; yet Havilah hailed it as affording a faint security and a certain promise. It threw a dim light over the scene; in three hours more it would be sunrise, and she breathed freer.

Just then, when her eye was refamiliarizing itself with the surrounding objects as they gradually emerged from the darkness, she caught sight of something which seemed to steel her vision: it was not a tent, a camel, or a goat, for it moved along the surface of the ground, specially like a serpent. It was what Havilah had been looking and listening for all night, and calmly, like one prepared, she arose and followed it.

It crept in and out among the goats-hair dwellings, paused, lifted up its head, looked around, and hesitated, then kept on its way, often, however, pursuing an uncertain course, sometimes retracing its steps. Its convolutions were rapid, but not more so than those of its pursuer, who, gliding round the tents like a shadow, secured herself from sight, yet never once lost sight of her object.

At length, by an oblique approach, the latter gained its destination outside a tent in no way distinguishable from the others, save by a practised eye. The creature — a human creature, for such it was — now took a sly observation in every direction, laid his ear to the ground, and listened attentively, then lifted a strip of goats-hair on the eastern side

and entered the desert lodging. The tent was small, boasted no furniture save a couch of Damascus mats, and had but a single occupant, the Englishman. Perplexed by the previous day's experiences, Meredith had sat cogitating them until midnight, then, overcome by the multiplied fatigues they had involved, he had wrapped himself in a mantle of Scotch tweed, and lain down upon his pallet, where he slept as soundly as a tired schoolboy; as innocently too, for as the moon just above the eastern horizon cast its rays directly through the aperture, it revealed a noble head pillowed child-like on one arm, the hair thrown back so as to display the grand development of the broad white brow, and every line of the frank countenance refuting the thought that this man could cherish malice, or possess an enemy.

And yet over his unprotected breast leaned one with a savage face, a sharpened dagger, and a soul thirsting for blood.

There seemed to be but a breath between the sleeper and the grave, for there was no mercy in the face of the assassin, but at the very moment when the thin, muscular arm was lifted for the stroke, and the dagger was pointed at the victim's heart, another arm was resolutely lifted, and another hand grasped the hilt of the weapon. The would-be murderer saw the shadow that interfered between him and his purpose before he felt the touch of the mastering hand. He turned, recoiled, and became deadly pale; his lips, that had been compressed in vengeance, suddenly parted in horror; his arm dropped powerless. Havilah held the dagger aloft; Abdoul stood before her, disarmed and paralyzed.

She waved the shining steel towards the outside of the tent, and motioned to the youth to follow her. She did not speak, she did not even touch him; she simply raised her wand of office; and with his eye fixed on the blade, the boy *obeyed, as the needle obeys the magnet.* She walked erect *with unhesitating pace; he dragged his limbs unwillingly, along like a criminal under arrest; but he was spell-bound, and attempted no resistance.* She did not pause until she had

gained an open space at some distance from the encampment; then she stopped short, and faced him.

"Playing the night murderer in thy father's tents, Abdoul?" exclaimed she, in a tone of bitter scorn. "Has my brother become a beast?"

The sound of her voice broke the spell by which his fury had been chained; her taunting question well-nigh maddened him into the thing she likened him to, for without warning he started from his cringing posture, and with a panther-like bound, strove to wrest his dagger from her hand.

Had Havilah suddenly gained in height, or was it merely the majesty of her presence, as she stood with the knangar uplifted above her head, which overawed the boy, and so placed the prize above his reach? However it might be, his attempt failed, and with his eye fixed hopelessly upon the weapon, he suffered his hand to drop heavily at his side, while his whole form relapsed into insignificance.

"I shall not trust thee with it," said Havilah, proudly; "thou art not fit to handle steel."

The youth gnashed his long white teeth, and glared upon her like a wild cat; but she continued, fearlessly: "Was it for this, false boy, that thou didst decoy us to the tents of Zanadeen? Is thy boasted desert but a trap for the stranger; and does thy deceitful tongue flatter only to betray?"

Abdoul once more, exasperated at her words, answered only by making a second plunge at the dagger, which this time he almost clutched; but with a forbidding gesture she waved him off, and held him fixed by the power of her eye, while she said, "Stand back! strive not with me, but thank Heaven, who has sent me to save thee from shedding the blood of a noble and innocent man."

"I hate him! I spit on him with contempt!" muttered Abdoul between his teeth.

"Thou hatest him without a cause," said Havilah; "and thy contempt has recoiled upon thine own head. The Englishman is as brave as thou art cowardly; as true as thou art false; as generous as thou art mean."

"He has crossed my path; he has trodden me under his heel. The curse of Allah be upon him!" said Abdoul, bitterly.

"His path is a straight one," responded Havilah. "What wonder if it crosses the crooked ways of thy deceit? But tell me not that he has crushed thee under foot. He has a heart which would forbid him to trample even on a worm."

"The track of the desert caravan is not more straight than was the course of Abdoul before the stranger came hither to thwart him," said the youth; "but the feeble has been pushed aside to make way for the strong, and the wayfarer that has been oppressed by the enemy has become in his turn a robber and a spy."

"Thou speakest as if the Englishman had wronged thee, Abdoul," said Havilah. "Thou art deceived. What could he need that was thine?"

"What could he need! Thou mayst well ask that, Havilah," exclaimed Abdoul, with intense passion. "He came from the land of wealth and freedom, and fair-haired hours, the daughters of his race. He had gold with which to adorn his home, and a face and tongue made to win woman's love. Why need he come hither to buy up the hearts of my tribe, and sit in my green oasis, and drink from the fountain of my hopes, and pluck the solitary flower that grew thereby?"

"He has not defrauded thee thus; he does not merit thine ill-will," said Havilah, with a positiveness of assertion which was nevertheless combined with a kindly tone, for she comprehended and pitied the mad jealousy of Abdoul.

"Dost thou tell me," interrogated Abdoul, fiercely, "that he who steals my horse or my camel is a thief, and he who steals the light of mine eyes is blameless? Shall the man who has slain mine uncle in a skirmish be the object of my *blood-revenge*? and shall he who has poured poison into my *cup* not be called on to atone? 'God hath not given a man *two hearts within him*,' that one can be spared to the enemy *Let the Englishman beware.* The Arab that has been by

on camels' flesh has fortified his soul in hatred."* He seemed as he spoke the last words to grind them out from between his jaguar teeth; and the vindictiveness that shone in his eye was fearful.

"Poor boy! thou art frenzied with some imaginary wrong," said Havilah, compassionately.

"The pale Frank has maddened me," said the youth, clenching his fist. "I have eaten sorrow and drunk affliction ever since his tall shadow darkened the land. He has come with the power of sorcerers and jinns, and all things do his bidding. He is the father of a strong will; women are his worshippers, and men his slaves. Thou fearedst the Englishman once, but thou lovest him now, Havilah."

As Abdoul made this last assertion he drew close to Havilah, and shook his clenched fist before her face as if daring her to contradict him.

Thus far this exciting scene had proceeded without witness or interruption, but a third party now drew near the spot, and other ears caught the succeeding words of the dialogue. Either the moonlight shining directly across his face, or that mysterious consciousness which sometimes visits one in sleep, had suddenly awaked Meredith. The gaping aperture in his tent covering instantly betrayed the circumstance of some recent intrusion, the source of which he made haste to ascertain, and accident guiding him in the direction Havilah had taken, he soon detected her figure and that of the boy. As it never occurred to his straight-forward and unsuspecting nature to doubt that his presence would be welcome, whatever the dilemma, he advanced unhesitatingly, until suddenly checked by Abdoul's final allusion to the Englishman. Loth to take an unfair advantage (for he perceived at once that his approach had been unobserved), Meredith might have felt bound in honour to withdraw, but at the same instant he caught sight through the dim atmosphere of the dagger which

* Such is the vindictiveness of the camel's disposition that it is proverbial among the Arabs, that those fed on camels' flesh become unfeeling and revengeful.

Havilah held resolutely above her head, and beheld the savage firelight in Abdoul's eye, and the threatening gesture of his fist. Meredith could not leave the dearest object to him on earth exposed to such imminent danger, and he stood therefore transfixed, hesitating between his impulse to throttle the boy, and his reluctance to rush uncalled for upon the scene.

Havilah made no reply to the charge which Abdoul enforced with such violence, and persevering upon her silence he continued insolently.

"Yes, I have watched thee as they watch whose life hangs on a thread. Abdoul needs no base rhymers, a dog and son of a dog, to tell him that the eyes which once helped to light the starry heavens, now borrow all their flame from the pale orbs of that son of the West. Thy heart flutters when *he* is beside thee as a young eaglet flutters in the hand of the hunter; when *he* speaks thine ear is deaf to all other music. His image is in thy soul, and is reflected on thy face. Thou lovest him, Havilah!"

Until he reached the last words, Abdoul spoke in a vituperative tone, fiercely scanning Havilah's features meanwhile; but as his passionate vehemence reached its climax, he uttered the words "Thou lovest him, Havilah!" close to her ear, and with a prolonged hiss.

"And what if I do love him?" exclaimed Havilah, indignantly repulsing the boy, whose audacity offended, though it failed to alarm her. "Is that a matter for scoffing and for scorn? I tell thee, Abdoul, to love worthily and well is to grow into the likeness of angels. One heart possessed by a holy love has the strength, the courage, and the faith of two. Be ashamed of hatred — but for love thank God."

"Praise be to Allah for his good gifts," said the boy, with a touch of reverence which contrasted strangely with the prevailing tone of his language; "but love," and he here resumed his accent of contradiction and of wrath, "love is a blast of the evil spirit; it is the very simoom's breath. It consumes

like a pestilence, it scorches like a fire, it drinks up the life-blood, and reduces the heart to ashes."

"Hush, Abdoul!" said Havilah, with imperious and reproving gesture. "Thou profanest a sacred word, and libellest the thing which thou knowest not. That which thou hast described is what love is not: listen now while I tell thee what love is. It is a power within the soul, which links it to all things good. It is the breath of heaven. It is virtue's native air. It lifts the heart into the presence of its maker. It expands it until it embraces all the earth. To love God is to do his will. To love man who is made in the image of God, is to see in him a likeness to the Father. He who is most like God claims largest love. To love such a one is to trust in his truth, to cherish his honour, to seek his glory, to serve him with joy, to blossom in his smile as the flower blossoms in the sun, forgetful of self, and content to draw its light from him."

She threw back her head as if triumphing in the very meekness of the love which she proudly professed. Abdoul gazed up at her as if she had been a distant star which he was studying.

"Experience is thy teacher, Havilah," he exclaimed accusingly; then clasping his hands together as if in final appeal, he ejaculated with frantic eagerness, "Thou lovest! thou lovest *him*!"

"And if I do," said Havilah, in the same royal and defiant tone in which she had previously spoken, "what is that to thee?" She placed her hand lightly upon his shoulder as she spoke, partly to give impressiveness to her words, partly to repel his proximity, for his scrutinizing face was close to hers. Apparently her touch overcame him, for he sank beneath it as if it had been a leaden weight, and dropping on his knees with his hands still clasped gazed in her face with excitement, yet with awe.

"Canst thou comprehend a soul like his?" she continued, "or sound the depths of his kingly heart? Can one who is torn by selfish passions believe in a love which can outlive coldness, disappointment, and scorn, which can endure rejection?"

banishment, which, when earth is dark, and hope gone out, can find its solace in the love of the Most High, and drawing priceless treasures from the Infinite, return to pour them all out in the service of her from whom he neither asks nor hopes a return? Canst thou who creepst in the dead of night to refresh thy shrivelled heart in the blood of a rival, believe in a generosity which is boundless, a faith that suspicion cannot taint, a devotion as disinterested as the sunlight? When thou canst believe this, Abdoul, then wilt thou know that the Englishman has loved with a love of which Havilah is not worthy."

As Havilah finished speaking, the Arab suffered his clasped hands to drop upon the earth; his face sank upon his hands, and the simple words which once more burst from his lips, "thou lovest him!" were no longer a taunt, but a wail.

"And if I do," said Havilah, as she stood like a reproving seraph looking down upon the prostrate face of the boy, "thou shouldst thank me for a love which has saved thee from the foulest crime in an Arab no less than a Christian calendar. Was it not enough to repay the Englishman's indulgence with falsehood, and his kindness with hate, but that thou must forfeit thus the courage of a chieftain and the honour of a host, to lurk round the door of thy guest's tent like a serpent, and pounce upon him like a wolf? What thinkest thou would be the verdict of thy tribe were it known that the son of Zanadeen, the pride of Arab chivalry, had violated the laws of hospitality, had betrayed the sacred trust, and had attempted the life of the stranger whom Bedouin honour was sworn to protect? Thou knowest that thine own father and brother would disown thee, and that wert thou famishing in the wilderness, there is not a bare-legged boy among all thy race who would not spurn thee from his father's tent."

Abdoul sank lower and lower at her feet. He seemed *literally to writhe* on the ground as she thus charged home to *him his crime*. He answered only by a groan.

"Abdoul," said she, bending over him now, and speaking in a *pitying* tone, for his groan of anguish had roused her

compassion, "I am grieved for thee, Abdoul, my brother. I will not doubt even now that thy purposes were fair when thou didst invite us hither. If thou hast betrayed thy guest, it is because thine own soul did first betray thee. Then act not thyself. Some evil spirit has taken possession of thee, my poor boy."

She paused, but there was no response. Utterly subdued and powerless, the youth lay quite still, and she continued in a pleading and trembling voice. "Oh, Abdoul, drive out the enemy that wars against thy better self; turn all thine anger and thy wrath against the besetting fiend. For my sake, for the sake of Havilah, once thy playmate, and still thy friend, — for the sake of the happy and innocent days which thou hast passed in El Fureidis, abjure thy wicked manhood, and be a harmless boy again. I beseech thee as a sister, Abdoul; I entreat thee by the memory of her who cherished thee in thy misfortunes, healed thy wounds, and comforted thy bruised spirit, and taught thee the simple lessons of our Christian faith; by the memory of one who was dear to thee, my mother, our mother — Ianthe."

At the closing word of the adjuration, Havilah's voice faltered, tears were streaming down her face, and her voice became choked and husky.

For a moment it seemed as if she had been addressing a lifeless clod, Abdoul lay so still and torpid beneath her gaze; then suddenly a low, gurgling sob escaped him; he dragged himself a step nearer to Havilah, and clasping his thin hands around her feet, he kissed them passionately.

As he flung himself forward for this servile but convulsive embrace, Meredith, alarmed at the movements, advanced incautiously to Havilah's protection. She turned her head slightly, saw him, but fearless of danger, signed to him to keep silence, and herself standing rigid and erect, patiently awaited the end. It was at hand. One long, fervent clasp, one storm of devouring kisses pressed rapturously upon the submissive feet, and the boy had covered his face with his *kefiyeh*, had sprung from his grovelling posture, had bound

like an arrow from the bow across the few yards of space that intervened between him and the khádhere, that had intelligently loitered hard by, had mounted, and was far away on the desert.

As the toddling babe whose little courage is spent, and stretches out its hand for help, Havilah stretched out hers to Meredith. He clasped it in his, and with strained eyes and beating hearts, together they watched the boy. The moon now cast a long pillar of light across the plain, and illuminated the horseman's course. The journey was a flight, the Khádere a winged bird. It seemed but a moment ere the white mare had dwindled in the distance to the size of a sea-gull, then to that of a swallow; a moment more, and the creature was but a speck against the horizon: a breath, a fluttering of the eyelid, and the Khádhere and her master had vanished in the boundless void.

The eyes that had followed them now rested on vacancy; the pair of watchers stood alone on the desert waste, which seemed like an inverted world whence all things save themselves were swept clean away. "Havilah!" was the first word that broke the deep silence.

The voice vibrated through all space. Earth, sky, and air seemed to have spoken her name. She listened as one listens to a far-off sound, kept her eye fixed upon the distant horizon, trembled, but made no answer.

There was a long pause, then the voice was heard again, solemnly as before. "Havilah, is yonder boy mad, or did he speak the truth?"

Again it was as if the great voice of nature spoke, demanding a reply; and Havilah answered, slowly and with reverence, as if testifying to heaven, "He spoke truth."

"And you love me, Havilah?"

This time the voice was low and tremulous; a whisper from the human heart that was beating close beside her. She turned as suddenly as if now she first realized the presence of Meredith, dropped Abdoul's dagger from one hand, drew the other from the Englishman's grasp, clasped both together,

and looking up into his face as trustingly as if it had been the face of an angel, she exclaimed, "I do!"

She was not prepared for the effect of her abrupt confession. He staggered back as if he had received a blow, bowed his head upon his hands, and his broad chest heaved spasmodically. Had he been so ignorant, so blinded, so incredulous to the last, that the truth should rush upon him now with such stunning power? Could it be true that this strong, this self-sustained man who had, so far as she knew, borne misfortune, loss, and despair with unshaken fortitude, could be unmanned by two little words, and a look?

Havilah was frightened. She had seen her excitable Arab lover maddened by despair; that was natural; she could understand, while she pitied the boy. But she had not yet sounded the depths of this great Anglo-Saxon heart. She had not yet learned that they who can suffer longest and best have within them the well-springs of intensest joy, — a joy the first outgushing of which can shake to its foundations the frame that has withstood a hurricane of sorrows.

She was awed, but her awe was innocent and childlike, and acted itself out accordingly. She came close to him, laid her hand soothingly on his arm, stood still a moment, then quietly strove to uncover his face, that she might read the secret of his agitation in his eyes.

Her touch calmed him, or rather it concentrated his fever of excitement, which ceased to evince itself outwardly, though the fire burned within; lifting his head, and standing erect in his imposing height, he caught both her hands in his, but by the power of a determined will he held her at arm's length while he warned her thus, "Havilah, think well! you know not what you say! you know not the value of the gift you bestow. Recall it before it is too late."

"But I love you," she murmured in an apologetic tone.

"Beware, lest I take advantage of your words," he *exclaimed, with the forced sternness of an advocate striving against himself.* "I am a repentant and a humbled man. I *not challenge my presumption and pride.* They sleep"

but they may wake again. I see myself as I am, a beggar in all that could give me a claim to your love; but tempt me not, Havilah. The starving will sometimes steal. What wonder, then, if they snatch the treasure thrown in their path? Take it back then, dear child, retract your thoughtless words while yet you may."

"I cannot retract," said Havilah, with an ineffable smile — "for I love you."

"You pity, you would befriend; but you do not love me, Havilah," persisted Meredith, still pleading valiantly, as he believed in her behalf; but drawing her nearer to him as he spoke. "Blessed girl! you have walked in the light from your childhood. I have but just shaken the dust from my eyes, and fought my way out of darkness. What am I that I should dream of mating with a star?"

"Does God's sunlight shine less brightly on the flower just bursting from the sod, than on the aloe of a hundred years' growth? Does He not shed instant glory on the head of every child who seeks his face?" asked Havilah, looking up at Meredith, as if she saw the reflection of God's love in him.

Her countenance, on which the moonlight shone full, was so radiantly beautiful, so sweetly confiding, that Meredith could scarcely resist the temptation to snatch her to his heart, and call her his, as she had almost dared him to do; but perhaps the very perfection of her loveliness was a reproach to him in his utter self-abasement, for with iron firmness he still held her aloof, while he said,

"Havilah, my beautiful one! my morning star! I have worshipped you as a saint — shall I dare claim you as a wife? Men call me cold, Havilah (his heart while he spoke was a burning volcano); reserved, I know I am (the deep places of his nature even now were breaking up). I have come from the land of clouds and fog. I am the son of a rugged race. You are all warmth and blossom. You have been reared in a summer clime. I tremble lest I might cast a chill over your young life, or shadow it with a cloud. Precious child, are you not afraid?"

It was well she was not afraid, for her chance of escape was well-nigh gone. He had wreathed his arms tightly round her. She was already netted in his embrace.

"You have been to me as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land," she said. "I ask no other rest or shelter;" and she suffered her head to drop upon his shoulder.

He pressed her convulsively to him for an instant, exclaiming: "Oh, what have I done to be so blest above other men? or rather," he added, as abruptly releasing her, "is it not a sin for me who have left so much undone to reap a reward so far beyond my deserts?"

"They deserve most who claim least," said Havilah. "Your cup then should be full. If I had more to offer, it should be yours; but I gave you long ago all I had to give — my heart."

Her head drooped upon her bosom as she spoke. Not until she had thus filled up the measure of her self-surrender did she startle at her own temerity; but now she cast down her eyes, and trembled like a timid dove.

"Havilah," cried Meredith, in the desperate tone of one whose long-controlled emotions are just breaking from their last anchor — "look at me;" and taking her head between his hands, he lifted her blushing face to his, and gazed into her eyes; "tell me — shall a man dare accept that at the hand of heaven which he has not dared ask for even in his prayers?"

"Love is a free gift," said Havilah. "Take it or not, it is love still. O take it, or let me go!" and looking wildly around her, she struggled to escape her bonds.

"Let you go, my darling, never!" exclaimed Meredith. "If I have resisted the gift, it was only to make it truly mine — my joy, my life, my paradise!"

He had already clasped her to his breast. As he bent over her, she twined her arms about his neck, and as he snatched her to the height of his embrace, she fancied herself lifted from off the earth and enthroned in some upper realm of joy. And he, as if he had clasped a seraph, felt his whole be-

etherealized. His old world lay around him a desert. This near world was in his arms.

They were alone amid endless space, but they had no sense of isolation. The past was but the path which had led them hither, the future, like the expanse amid which they stood, was boundless. The silence was the voiceless harmony of a great joy. It was as if both had encountered in the wilderness the angel of their earthly heaven, had held a trembling parley at the gate, then together had entered in.

Intense rapture is a pain. Havilah's found vent in a flood of tears; but long after these were dry, she could not only feel, but in the deep silence she could hear Meredith's heart throbbing against hers like a heavy drum. "Hush! hush!" she whispered softly to the beating heart.

"Do not hush it," he said. "The poor heart has been stifled long enough; let it beat on now, such joy as mine has heart-throbs, but no words."

He was the first, however, to break the silence that succeeded. "Whence came this happiness?" was the question of a heart unused to anything but pain; and the query found vent in the whisper, "How long have you loved me?"

"When your soul went forth to meet the Infinite, mine went forth to meet you," said Havilah. "The spirit that moved the one wrought upon the other. Ever since you caught the illumination of heaven I have yearned to bask in your light."

"My light is but a faint glimmer, Havilah. You must lead me into the perfect day."

"The oak plants its root deep in the forest-shade," said Havilah, "but the clinging vine that twines round its stem has faith that thus it shall creep upwards to the light. So only can the feeble climb."

"We will climb together, my blessed one. Life's toil will be easy in such sweet company. And how long will you love me, Havilah?"

"Love has nothing to do with time," said Havilah; "love *is immortal.*"

"Oh, bless you for that word! You are mine, then, as I am yours, for all eternity. The time has been when I should have been satisfied with less, when my heart would have leaped to hear you say, I love you this day, this hour; but then I loved as men love who die — not as now, with the love of souls which live for ever."

"It is morning, my love," whispered Havilah. "See the rosy light streaks the east."

"It is morning, indeed," responded Meredith, a sunlight glow lighting up his beatified features — "morning in the desert, and you, Havilah, are the dawn. My heart was a great deep, and darkness was on the face of it; but your voice has broken up the void: life was a desert waste, but a morning star has arisen to cheer the traveller on his way."

"We have groped through a night of darkness and doubt, to find each other at last," said Havilah; "but with both of us it is daylight now."

"To Him who first said, 'Let there be light, and there was light,' to Him be the praise and the glory," said Meredith.

And Havilah said, "Amen."

CHAPTER XXXII.

The Conclusion.

ABDOUL returned no more to the encampment. The boy had forfeited his honour; but they whom he had wronged were true, and no hint of his midnight treachery and assault ever fell from the lips of Meredith or Havilah. The chivalrous old sheik, however, was sufficiently mortified at the escapade of the previous evening and his son's non-appearance, and when his guests, in accordance with their previous intention, urged an early departure, he could only press his hand on his heart, and with a dejected air profess himself their grateful and already too much honoured servant. Even to the last moment his spirits continued sadly depressed; the kind a

cordial farewell of his new friends, so far from soothing, served only to aggravate his shame as a father and his sentiments as a host; and when the caravan finally rode off escorted by Mahmoud, his brother's son, Zanadeen blessed them with up-lifted hands, and eyes that were streaming with tears.

A day on the desert. A night passed in the dwelling of the governor of Jerúd; a second day's diligent journeying under the protection of a fresh escort furnished by the Aga, and our travellers reached Baalbec.

No striking adventure marked or interrupted their progress. To the lovers only was the journey memorable. But they alone with their secret joy, travelling on amid unbroken silence under the great "eye of Heaven," could revel in one glad thought, could indulge at will in one sweet absorption. Rare privilege in this world of ours, where events trample upon each other in quick succession, and busy life is for ever at war with meditation.

The illimitable desert, so vast, so unobtrusive, and so still, was symbolic of that one all-embracing idea which filled the souls of Meredith and Havilah. The world seemed to have stepped aside; only heaven looked smiling on while her happy children basked in the sunshine.

Sweet, unbroken, and exultant was the calm of those desert days. Grand, heroic, and full of noble purpose were the days that succeeded. Baalbec, with its quaint record of the past, broke up the pensive charm in which the great solitude had wrapped the heart; but the outward and the real were not less welcome because the inward and the ideal had had their day. Standing on the massive temple platform, beneath the shadow of the six colossal pillars, Havilah and Meredith first pledged themselves to each other for the great work of life. In the midst of those magnificent ruins which indicate at once man's power and his insignificance, they joined hands in the cause of humanity and the active service of God, and with the inspiration and energy of united hearts, resolved that whatsoever their hands might find to do, they would do it with their might.

Great structures, whether triumphing in perfection or reflecting fallen glory, fire the imagination and stir the soul to generous deeds. But a holier place than ancient Baalbec sanctified and set the seal to the resolutions enkindled within the sight of the Temple of the Sun.

Beneath the ancient cedars of Lebanon, primeval monarchs of the primeval world, contemporaries of prophets and of seers, in that holiest of nation's temples to which pilgrims of all nations come eagerly to hold communion with him whose glory it shadowed forth, the two hearts made one in love, poured those hearts out in worship, and dedicated their love to the source of all love, and felt their life laid with Christ in God.

Here too they made others share in their joy. Here, in the presence of those great old witnesses which testify to the truths of all ages, Havilah made a blushing recantation of the resolve which nearly a year ago had disappointed the dearest hopes of her father. M. Trefoil, blind and obtuse to the last, was thunderstruck, incredulous, overwhelmed; and when the light which shone in the eyes of his daughter and Meredith, and the touch of their hands mutually clasping his convinced him of the truth which otherwise he could not have believed, his agitation and bewilderment were such that Havilah trembled lest the mind which a shock of sorrow had enfeebled should be once more paralyzed by a sudden influx of joy. But her fears were groundless. Such natures as M. Trefoil's assimilate with happiness, and assume prosperity as easily as a well-fitting garment. He soon smiled with calm complacency upon the new state of affairs; familiarized himself by a sort of native instinct with the turn events had taken; and though the startling character of the communication impressed him seriously for the time, the good man would have his joke, and often maintained in after years, rubbing his hands complacently together, that his simple daughter *thought she had outwitted her old father; but that his penetration had never once been in fault. His mountain girl understood coquetry as well as any city belle: her indiffer-*

to that good fellow Meredith was a girl's affectation, and he (M. Trefoil) had suspected it all the while.

M. Lapierre made no boast of superior discernment, but his insight into human nature was as keen as it was silent and unobtrusive. He was far from being taken by surprise when Meredith and Havilah came to crave his paternal blessing; and the serenity of his approving smile witnessed to them both how truly he had read and interpreted their hearts.

His benediction was in keeping with the time and the scene. He laid a hand benignantly on the head of each, while he said, "He is a worthy mate for you, my daughter; he has been tried in the furnace of affliction, and has come forth pure gold. Trust him with your whole heart; repose undoubtingly in the rest of his love, for he dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High; he shall abide in the shadow of the Almighty."

Havilah turned her eyes confidently upon her lover, and the look was an answer.

"Be to her, my son, like the cedar of Lebanon to the dove that hath built her nest in its shade. Uphold her, protect her, shelter her from the storms of life;" and as the young man answered, "I will," his voice was deep like the wind among the branches, and solemn as a response at the altar.

There had been joy in El Fureidîs. The voices of the people had gone up in gladness and thanksgiving; the valleys had rung with the nuptial shout and song, the mountains had echoed the peal, and the marriage bells had made music among the heights of Lebanon. The old friars had descended once more from their convent, bearing simple offerings in their hands, and fervent benedictions on their lips. Mustapha had come, laden with rich gifts from Damascus. *Maysunah* had woven the bridal chaplet, and accompanied the bride to the altar; and the same day which saw Meredith and Havilah's united in holy wedlock had witnessed the baptism of the Turk and his daughter at the Christian font.

There had been sorrow in El Fureidís. There had been partings and farewells. Lingered looks had been exchanged, and last words spoken. The Damascene and his daughter had turned their steps towards the rising sun, while their friends had travelled westward. The simple villagers had followed the wedding-train for miles over mountains and through valleys, proud of their English benefactor, proud that El Fureidís had so amply repaid him for his bounty, but vainly striving to repress the tears which streamed down their bronzed cheeks as they watched him depart, bearing away their Lebanon rose.

But as in the villagers' joy at the marriage there had been a foretaste of their pain in this farewell, so their present sorrow was not without its promise of future joy. As they turned their steps homeward they could solace their hearts with the thought that El Fureidís would still be the frequent summer home of Meredith and Havilah; that M. Trefoil, who was to accompany his daughter to England, would return in the following spring; that the villa would then be repaired, the silk-factory arise from its ruins, and that meanwhile the liberality of the Englishman had insured themselves and their families from want.

It was a summer morning in Syria; the white walls of Beyrout, standing out from their background of gardens and groves, seemed to concentrate the sunlight, and reflect its heat with redoubled power. The early hours of the day were past, the hum of city activity had subsided, idlers had retreated to the shelter of their roofs and gardens, and only the laborious portion of the population exposed themselves to the scorching sun. There was no breeze in the bay. The vessels which lay at anchor there were wrapped in soft yellow light, and sleeping motionless on the tide. All things wore an attitude of rest and tranquil expectancy.

Conspicuous among the shipping in the harbour was a little English brig, whose sharply cut prow, fresh paint, and neat rigging, as well as her determined position at the point where she was certain to catch the first breeze, placed her;

strong contrast with the lazy feluccas and slovenly Greek craft which were moored in her vicinity. The captain of the yacht, a stout, compact, British seaman, was giving his final orders; the neatly dressed crew were bestowing the last professional touch upon the vessel's gear, or were standing ready to let out sail at the slightest provocation. In the cabin below a group of hearty friends were assembled round M. Trefoil. With a glass of *vino d'oro* in his hand, and his ruddy face glowing with pleasure, the honest manufacturer was responding to the healths and good-wishes proffered to him by half a score of native consuls, foreign residents, Armenian bankers, and jovial Greek merchants. These men had been M. Trefoil's Syrian contemporaries for many years; they had flocked now in the warmth of their hearts to bid him an affectionate farewell previous to the several months' absence which he meditated; and as he grasped their sympathetic hands, and received their cordial congratulations upon the marriage of his daughter, it was easy to see that the old man's satisfaction and pride had reached their climax.

Seated amidships, M. Lapierre and Meredith were also engaged in earnest conversation; but their final dialogue was of a more serious character than that of M. Trefoil and his convivial friends.

The missionary had accompanied the western-bound travellers to the sea-board, but the period of their setting sail was to be the signal of his return to El Fureidis, where, in addition to his pastoral duties, the secular interests of the little community were for the present delegated to his charge. The best means for securing the welfare of the peasantry had already been concerted between him and Meredith, but there were last counsels to be interchanged, last assurances on the part of M. Lapierre that ample provisions had been made for *his flock*, last promises on the part of Meredith to furnish aid *in any extremity*. There was paternal advice to be bestowed and filial gratitude to be expressed, and in the affectionate tenderness of the old man's manner, and the responsive glow

on the young man's face, the emotions of a year seemed concentrated into one parting moment.

Havilah sat alone upon the upper deck, where she was protected from the sun by a canvas awning. Here a few moments before she had held her little court, and responded cordially to the kind wishes of her father's friends; but the latter had gone simultaneously to drink a health below. M. Lapierre and Meredith had previously withdrawn for an uninterrupted conference, and Havilah, left to her own thoughts, had suffered her eyes and her mind to stray in the direction of her mountain home.

She was roused from her reverie by a slight plashing of the water beneath the stern of the yacht; the next instant a thin, tawny hand clasped the rail close beside her, a bound, a noiseless flutter of drapery, and a little figure had flung itself over the vessel's side, and knelt motionless as a stone at her feet. She sprang up, drew a quick breath, and looked around her like a startled fawn seeking the means of escape; then observing the still, submissive attitude of the muffled visitor, she hesitated, scrutinized him an instant, and said, with timorous questioning accent. "Abdoul?"

"Peace be with thee, lady, and fear me not," said Abdoul, slowly uncovering his face, and fixing his eyes upon her with mournful gravity.

She was awed by the solemnity of his address, and still more by the rigid and melancholy composure of his features. She stood attentive, and he continued. "When thou sawest me last I fled from thee with a fire in my heart, but the maddening flame of doubt has since been quenched in the cold waters of certainty. Thou callest the Englishman lord?"

"He is my husband," said Havilah.

"Allah has willed it so, and it is well," responded the youth, with the tone of one sternly submitting himself to fate. "I have attained to one of the 'two comforts.' Suspense is a torturing wound to the Arab, but if he be denied success, he knows how to endure despair. I have only now to crave par-

don for the past, and in view of the future to bid thee a final farewell."

"Thy pardon followed quick upon thine offence," said Havilah; "and in years to come, my brother, if it please Heaven, we shall meet again."

"Thy forgiveness is a balm to my soul," said Abdoul, making a profound salutation; "but, lady, we meet no more. 'The Lord goeth between a man and his beard.' The faithful one 'will not make his servant to bear what he had not strength to bear.' The earth is spacious; our paths lie apart; and I may not look upon thy face again."

"Be it so," answered Havilah, "and I say not but thou art wise. I shall still cherish thy memory and pray for thee, my brother."

"Thou art clothed with piety, therefore thy prayers will reach the throne," said Abdoul. "I am an unworthy servant of the prophet; but I will remember thee in the morning sacrifice, for it is written in the sacred book that 'the prayer of daybreak is borne witness unto by the angels.'"

He then made a sudden movement as if about to arise and depart; but Havilah checked him by a motion of her hand, and he continued resting on one knee while she said, "Stay yet a moment, Abdoul; thou must not leave me until I have spoken one more parting word, and restored to thee that which is thine."

As she spoke she took from a heap of shawls and light luggage which lay beside her, a roll of silken tissue, and commencing at one end, slowly unwound a rich, brilliantly dyed scarf, disclosing as she did so, first the jewelled hilt, and gradually the shining blade of Abdoul's dagger.

The boy's features, inflexible until now, twitched with nervous agitation, and an eager light gleamed in his eye as he caught sight of the weapon; but a subdued and mortified expression stole over his features as he met the glance of *Havilah*, and listened while she said "This muffled roll was *to have been my last charge* to the good father, and with it a

message for thee. But thou art here to receive both for thyself, which is far better. Take back thy dagger, Abdoul, and let it be the seal of forgiveness and friendship between me and thee. Use it as becomes a servant of God and a chieftain's son. Defend the weak, maintain the truth, *protect the stranger*. So shalt thou be armed with self-respect, and merit the blessings and thanks of Havilah."

Abdoul bowed low in acknowledgement of the offerings held out to him, received the dagger, which he hid hastily in his bosom, and said solemnly, with his hand pressed upon his heart, "By the 'morning when it appeareth, by the redness of the sky after sunset, by the night, and by the moon when she is at the full,' I swear to do thy biddings. 'When the sun shall be folded up, and when the stars shall fall, and when the seas shall be suffered to join their waters, and when the mountains shall be made to pass away, and when the books shall be laid open, and when paradise shall be brought near, every soul shall know what it hath wrought.' See then if Abdoul hath been faithful."

"I will trust and believe thee, Abdoul," said Havilah.

"Bless thee, lady," said the youth, "and farewell. May Heaven's breezes give thee good voyage, and thy new home be as fresh soil to the transplanted flower. Salute thy lord from me with a respectful salutation. Heaven grant him long life, and give thee many years rest in his love; and if the staff of his strength should fail thee, may 'Allah shadow thee with his shadow in that day when there shall be no shade but his shadow.'"

As he finished speaking he bent his head to the planked floor, and without presuming to take Havilah's outstretched hand, or even to touch the hem of her robes, he pressed his lips reverentially upon the spot of the vessel's deck on which she had stood an instant before; then, with lightning-like velocity, swung himself over the side of the yacht, and disappeared.

The sudden splash in the water occasioned by his leap excited a vague fear in Havilah, who, forgetting that he

departed precisely as he came, uttered a quick exclamation of alarm, which brought Meredith at once to her side. As he joined her with an anxious inquiry, and before she had time to reply, her apprehensions were set at rest by the sight of a little skiff, which had started out from beneath the stern of the yacht, and which, rowed by two skilful seamen, was already making for a neighbouring promontory.

"Look there!" she exclaimed, pointing to a figure couched in the bottom of the boat; "it is Abdoul: he has come and gone like the vision of a dream; but it is well. He has blessed me, and we have parted in peace."

"Poor fellow!" soliloquized Meredith, in a tone of tender sympathy; and as they watched the boat swept round the curve of the little promontory, Havilah wiped away a tear.

At the same moment their cheeks were fanned by a fresh breeze from Lebanon. Immediately there was a stir on board the yacht. The master eagerly issued his orders, the anchor was raised, sails hoisted, and preparations made to take advantage of the favourable wind which had already begun to ripple the surface of the bay. M. Trefoil's friends embarked hastily on board the boat which waited to take them on shore. M. Lapierre, prompt as the youngest among them, made his last blessing as concise as it was fervent; with a firm step, passed over the vessel's side, and his head uncovered, his white hair streaming in the breeze, took the place reserved for him in the midst of the friendly throng. A moment more, and amid the waving of hands and reiterative farewells, and prayers of God speed, the English yacht had put out to sea.

She flew over the waters like a bird to the friendly eyes which watched her from the shore, her white sails now dipped into the dim horizon, and long ere the sun went down, she was out of sight on the blue Mediterranean.

But standing beside each other on the deck, Meredith and Havilah still cast lingering looks behind them. The white walls of Beyrout had disappeared from their eyes, the green *ardens* were no longer discernible against their mountain *background*; the bays and promontories of the Syrian coast

had merged into a line of dull uniformity; day was waning, and the sun was declining towards the west, but his light still shone on sacred Lebanon. This hope led the voyagers in the way they were going; but memory cast a fond look behind.

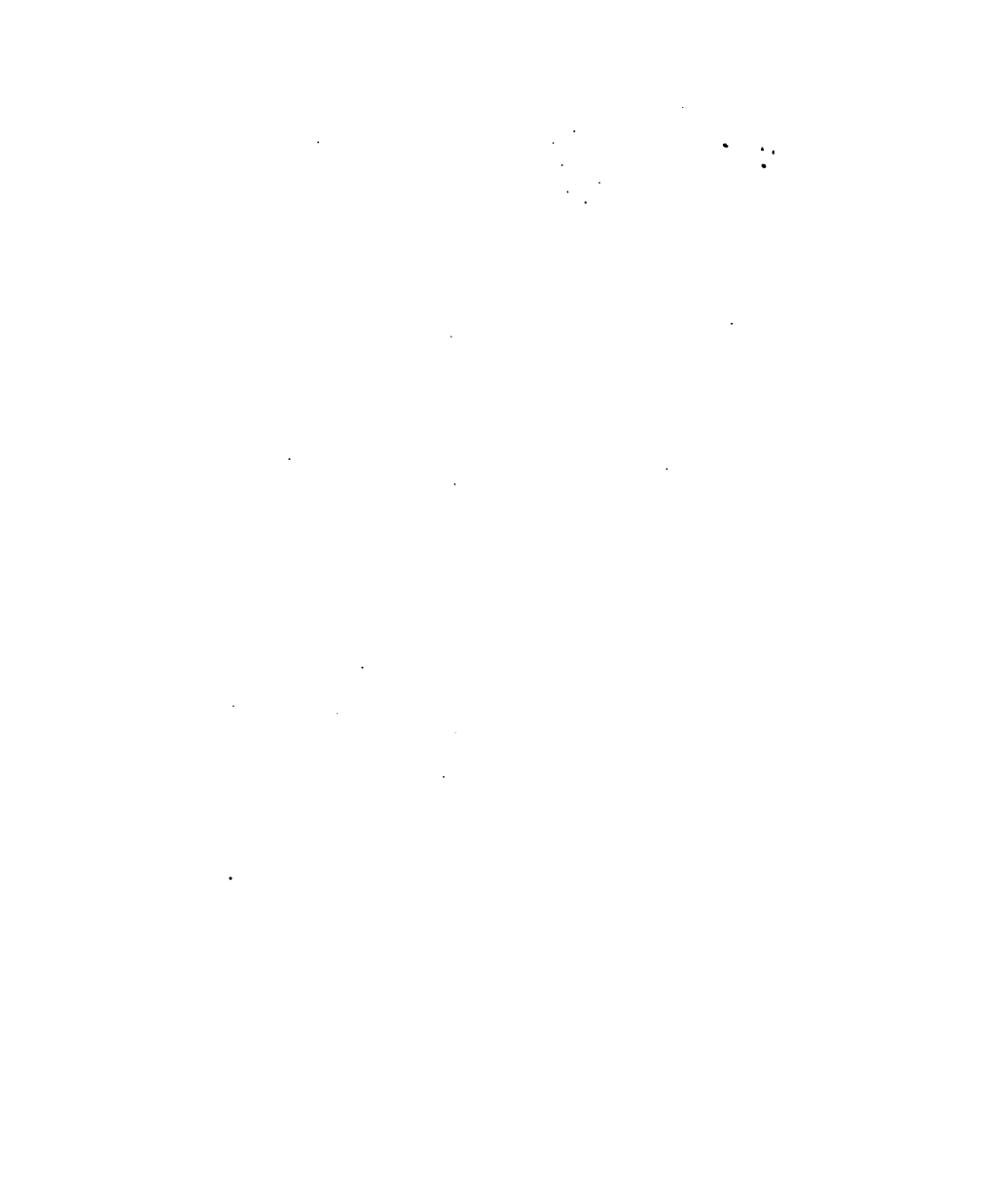
"Land of beauty, land of promise, land of the morning, farewell," said Meredith. "Thou hast given me thy best treasure, thou hast fulfilled to me all thy promises, thou hast kindled a day star in my heart;" and as he drew his young wife closer to his side, his face glowed with adoring gratitude to the Giver of all good.

"The mountains have been my home," said Havilah, "but I am content; my home is here;" and leaning trustingly upon her husband's shoulder, her soul kept company with his in its soaring flight.

Thus the thought of both travelled upwards. They watched the purple light, as it crept up the hill tops, and rested awhile on the crest of Lebanon, and when the light had faded into darkness, and day and night had mingled, and the mountains had melted into the sky, the hearts of the watchers were uplifted yet, for above them was heaven and its stars.

THE END.

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